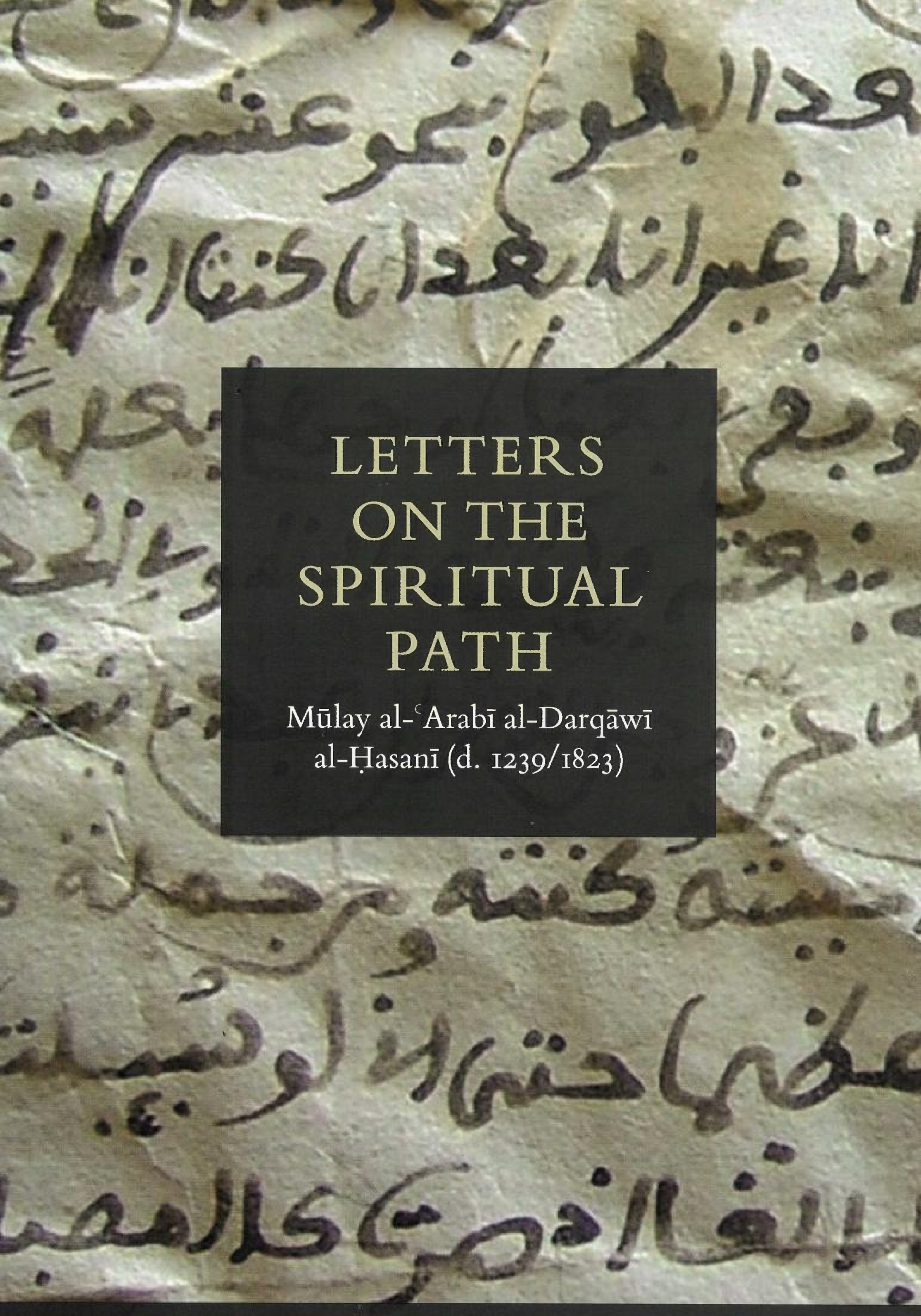


LETTERS ON THE SPIRITUAL PATH

Mūlay al-ʿArabī al-Darqāwī al-Ḥasanī (d. 1239/1823)

translated by

Mohamed Fouad Aresmouk & Michael Abdurrahman Fitzgerald

LETTERS ON THE SPIRITUAL PATH

This work is humbly dedicated to our beloved teacher, Mūlay Hachim al-Belghītī and to the memory of Sīdī ᶜAbdelḥamīd al-Zemrī, who brought the Ṭarīqat al-Ḥabibiyya to Marrakesh over 14 years ago by opening his heart to some students who were seeking the Way but had no idea what it was. Sīdī ᶜAbdelḥamīd passed away after the Tarawiḥ Prayers during the last ten days of Ramadan, 1424 (November, 2003)

الله يرحمه ويرضى عنه ويسكنه فسيح جنانه

LETTERS ON THE SPIRITUAL PATH

⁂

Mūlay al-ᶜArabī al-Darqāwī al-Ḥasanī
(d. 1239/1823) رضي الله عنه

translated by
Mohamed Fouad Aresmouk
& Michael Abdurrahman Fitzgerald

AL-MADINA
INSTITUTE

© 2018/1439 by Mohamed Fouad Aresmouk
& Michael Abdurrahman Fitzgerald

Published by: Al-Madina Institute

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the Al-Madina Institute the Publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

First Printing, 2018

ISBN 978-1-7322588-0-8 (Softcover)

Cover design and typography by
Ian Abdallateef Whiteman

Cover Photo by Zak Whiteman

Distributed by
Muslim Publishers Group

www.mpgbooks.com

info@mpgbooks.com
+1 (844) MPG BOOK

CONTENTS

Translators' Introduction xiii
The Shaykh Al-Darqāwī's introduction to his letters 1

THE LETTERS

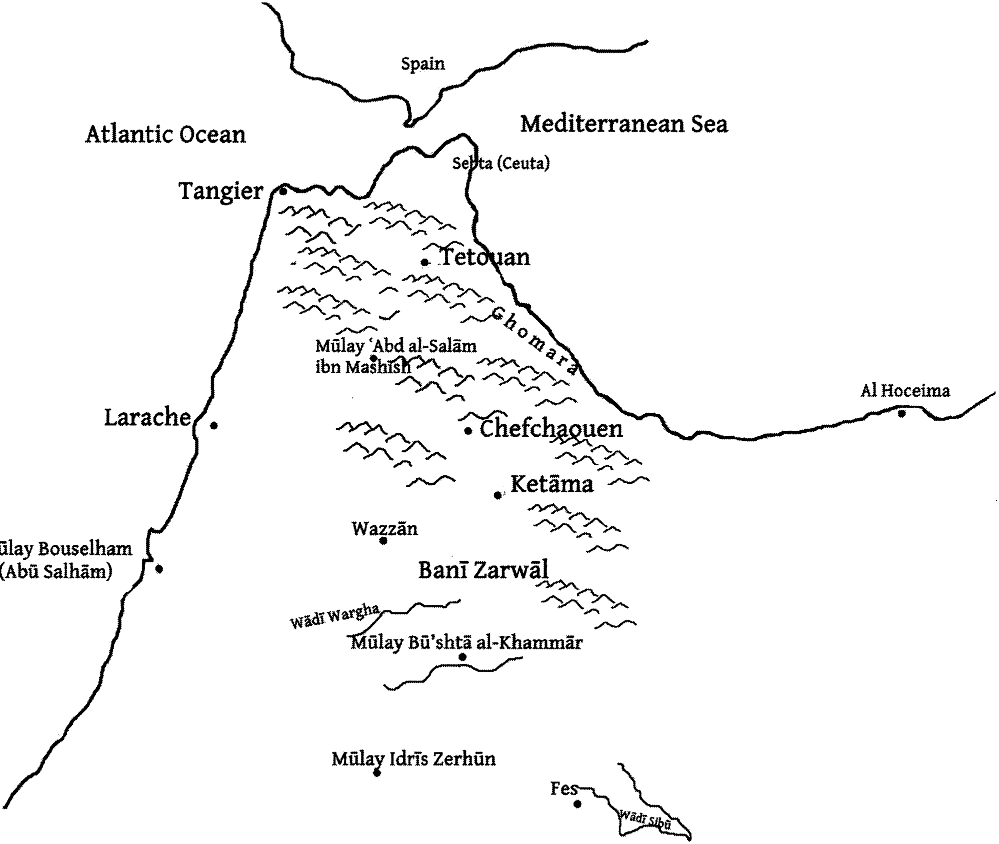
1 On maintaining the obligatory and the confirmed *sunna* **9**
2 Learning enough formal knowledge to accomplish the obligatory and confirmed *sunna*; the true meaning of Sufism **10**
3 The true meaning of the invocation and encouragement towards it **11**
4 Purifying servanthood from all else but God **13**
5 Concerning the manners of begging, wearing the patched robe, and their true meaning; the Way of the folk ﷺ **14**
6 On slaying the ego and occupying oneself with the Creator rather than the creation **16**
7 Letting God defend you **17**
8 The life of the heart is in giving up the love of this world and in the death of the ego **18**
9 Concerning *tajrīd* and dependence on God **19**
10 On not going to extremes in breaking norms **20**
11 Caution against the deceptions of this lower world, and the people who love it, regardless of their knowledge and practice **21**
12 The reality of the soul **22**
13 The necessity of a shaykh; the mystery of permission (*al-idhn*); the invocation of the Name **24**
14 Concerning the reason for repeating some of these teachings **29**
15 All goodness is in the invocation of God; being occupied with it alone to the exclusion of all else; keeping a distance from the mundane world **29**
16 The true meaning of the world and renunciation **31**
17 The true nature of the world and encouragement to detach ourselves from it **33**
18 On the invocation of blessings upon the Messenger of God ﷺ in all situations and with the best comportment **35**
19 Antagonism towards the Sufis **36**
20 Finding a reflective state in the recitation of the Qur'ān **36**
21 Choosing a shaykh **37**
22 The ailment of the heart **38**
23 Leaving work that causes tribulation **38**
24 On visiting the Shaykh; issues **39**
25 Not words, but states **40**
26 To someone confused about his situation **41**
27 The results of sincerity with God **42**
28 Keeping a distance from people **43**
29 Do not foster all that your heart conceives **44**
30 The signs of loving God **44**
31 Things are hidden in their opposites **45**
32 If we abandoned the world... **46**
33 The bride of incomparable beauty **46**
34 Strength **47**
35 The Shādhiliyya Path **47**
36 Turning to God **48**
37 The true meaning of invocation **49**
38 Constancy in asking God's blessings upon the Prophet ﷺ **50**
39 Avoiding involvement with people **51**
40 Good deeds done in private and public **53**
41 Concerning the one who says he has never tasted anything from his practice **54**
42 Getting rid of illusions **55**
43 The sign of one devoted to God **56**
44 Both the spirit and the ego are fashioned from the Prophet's Light ﷺ **56**
45 Rigor and beauty **57**
46 The Robes of reverent fear **57**
47 Putting ourselves in God's Hands **58**
48 Know God and all creation will know you **58**
49 Do not defend yourselves **49**

50 On seeing the Prophet ﷺ in the waking state **60**
51 The best advice **66**
52 On the spirit and the self **66**
53 The sensory dimension (*al-ḥiss*) **68**
54 Turning towards your Lord **69**
55 Veneration **70**
56 The man who became impressed with his spiritual knowledge **70**
57 On moderation in practice and the completion of sanctity **72**
58 To a disciple whose state wavers **73**
59 Repelling demonic thoughts **74**
60 On receiving the rain of divine inspiration **74**
61 The inward and the outward **75**
62 The worst disease **76**
63 On the value of intention **76**
64 Detachment from the world **77**
65 About detachment from the workaday world (*al-tajrīd*) **79**
66 Caution against trespassing the limits of the Law **81**
67 The face of freedom **82**
68 A little worship done with a good state is better than a lot done with a bad state **82**
69 The Shaykh's call; the mystery of permission(*al-idhn*); God's speech **83**
70 Benefitting from spiritual instruction **85**
71 Having high aspiration **86**
72 A little practice with a pure heart is better than much without **87**
73 Putting the limbs in accord with the heart **87**
74 A letter to certain *fuqahā* opposed to the Way **88**
75 Realize your true attributes and God will support you with His Attributes **92**
76 Visiting the masters of the Ṭarīqa; recognizing the shaykh **94**
77 Opposing the ego and its desires **97**
78 The livelihood of the *faqīr* **97**
79 A true *sharīf* is noble in character **98**
80 Weaning the ego **99**
81 Caution against being deluded by exoteric knowledge and its scholars **100**
82 Concerning his master, Sīdī ᶜAlī al-Jamal **111**
83 Not being deceived by those who act like Sufis **113**
84 On removing the garments of this world **114**
85 Avoiding worldly people **114**
86 The vision of God **115**
87 Veneration towards God and His saints and encouragement to make a Qur'anic exegesis extensive **115**
88 Seeking knowledge **117**
89 Finding strength in servanthood **117**
90 A saying of Sīdī ᶜAbdallāh al-Makīdī **118**
91 Receiving spiritual teachings; the beauty of God **118**
92 Spiritual dialogue **119**
93 The ego's whisperings **121**
94 Know what you are doing **123**
95 Silence and hunger **123**
96 A long letter concerning formal knowledge and God-given knowledge, humility, and other subjects **124**
97 A time each day for remembrance; more on the saying of Shaykh Zarrūq **132**
98 The proximity of God **134**
99 A dream **136**
100 Caution against imitating worldly scholars **136**
101 Integrity **137**
102 Respect for the masters of the Way
103 Companionship (*ṣuḥba*) through correspondence **137**
104 A great mercy will spread through creation **138**
105 Knowing God both in hardship and ease **139**
106 Imagination **142**
107 In the remembrance of God resides all good **143**
108 The danger of being naive; knowing your place in creation **143**
109 The path of return **145**
110 Sobriety and rapture **146**
111 The sensory and the spiritual **147**
112 Let your discourse be about what slays the ego **148**
113 Our Lord and Protector **148**
114 The man who kept quiet **149**
115 Silence **149**
116 Dig in one place **150**
117 Avoiding pretenders **151**
118 Caution against conjecture (*ẓann*) **151**
119 Some of the states of the Sufis **151**
120 A small amount of devotion with the heart **152**
121 Majesty and Beauty **153**
122 The marriage of the spirit and the self **154**

123 The way of inner and outer *tajrīd* **155**
124 Receiving the litany **160**
125 Following a shaykh **162**
126 Respect for the shaykh **164**
127 Placing our hardships in the Hands of God **165**
128 Do not defend yourself; let God defend you **166**
129 Drawing near to the Prophet ﷺ **167**
130 Being in contact with the shaykh **168**
131 Caution against breaking norms in ways that contravene the Law **168**
132 Contemplation **170**
133 Seeing God in all things **170**
134 Trials **174**
135 The fruit of invocation **175**
136 Surrendering to the Divine decree **176**
137 Being with creation and being with the Creator **176**
138 A question in the Qarawiyyin Mosque **177**
139 Sanctity (*al-wilāya*) and the saint (*al-walī*) **178**
140 The death of the ego **181**
141 The soul is like the earth **183**
142 Striving against the ego and its desires **185**
143 Why a devil is given some power over people of the Way **187**
144 Inviting people for gatherings of invocation and teaching **189**
145 Being open to "the breezes of the spirit"; visiting saints, both living and dead **190**
146 Caution against making begging a worldly pursuit **193**
147 The blessing of anonymity (*al-khumūl*) **194**
148 Concerning the judge who insulted some of the *fuqarā'* **196**
149 Invoking the Supreme Name and keeping silent except to mention the good **198**
150 Concerning al-Khiḍr ﷷ **199**
151 Servanthood (*al-ʿubudiyya*) **201**
152 The spiritual work of women; transmitting the litany **201**
153 The effects of too much talk, food, and social contact **203**
154 A letter summing up the Way **204**
155 Encouragement to a certain *faqīr* and what it means to be "just like other people." **207**
156 Seeing what is between you and the Creator rather than you and creatures **209**
157 The litany and "the breezes from your Lord" **210**
158 Proper comportment with God; sunna practices **211**
159 To a *faqīh* who treated a Sufi harshly **213**
160 Warning *fuqarā* against having circles of invocation in the marketplaces **217**
161 Aspire only to God **218**
162 The example of the People of the Porch (*ahl al-ṣuffa*) **219**
163 The possibility of seeing God **220**
164 Good character **222**
165 Concerning those who disregard the law **223**
166 Avoid being foolish **224**
167 Good character **224**
168 The people of God in the Next World **225**
169 Letter to those teaching for the sake of God **226**
170 Who is a saint? **226**
171 Speak of esoteric knowledge only to those who can understand it **227**
172 Visiting the saints **227**
173 An encounter at the shrine of Mūlay Idrīs in Fes **229**
174 A vision while teaching children **231**
175 A vision at the beginning of the Way **232**
176 The *faqīr* with a patched shirt **232**
177 The verse on a tablet **232**
178 The First and the Last, the Inward and the Outward **233**
179 When his shaykh removed his headcloth **235**
180 When he removed his prayer cap **236**
181 The incident concerning the zāwiya of Sīdī ʿAbdallāh al-Aghzāwī **237**
182 Pre-emption (*al-shufaʿa*) **238**
183 The villagers who had intended harm towards the *fuqarā'* **238**
184 The plowshare and pressing need (*iḍṭirār*) **240**
185 A crying enfant and pressing need (*iḍṭirār*) **241**
186 The crippled enfant **242**
187 The woman seized by spiritual ecstasy **242**
188 The two men who wanted to marry the same woman **244**
189 A powerful state in the mosque **244**
190 The lost ox **245**
191 Two men who wanted to marry the same woman **245**
192 The man who wanted to flee the authorities **246**

193 A man who learned the hard way **246**
194 An incident at a funeral **247**
195 The man who laughed in the mosque **248**
196 The man who talked too much and the hand-mill **249**
197 A request denied **249**
198 A conversation about the harvest **250**
199 The pretender who came to the *zāwiya* **250**
200 The best vocation **251**
201 News of a death **252**
202 A debt to a butcher **252**
203 The squash **252**
204 Letting God defend you **253**
205 Seeing al-Khiḍr **205**
206 The *fuqarā'* who were too busy **254**
207 The man who asked that his son leave the state of *tajrīd* **254**
208 The *sharīf* who harangued him for begging **256**
209 The man who struck his relative **256**
210 An incident in the marketplace **256**
211 When rain flooded the mosque **257**
212 Another prayer for rain **258**
213 A letter to the Sultan that did not get sent **259**
214 A wild boar **259**
215 A prayer for rain and for the Sultan **260**
216 The man who sought a cure for his wife **261**
217 The afflicted man from the Banī Akhmās **262**
218 The woman who was brought to the shrine of Sīdī Aḥmad ibn Yūsuf **262**
219 A vision while making the ablution **263**
220 The lost mule **264**
221 The lost cow **264**
222 A vision of Sīdī al-Shuʿayb **265**
223 A green dove **265**
224 The Pole **266**
225 The stork and the prayer cap **266**
226 "Here comes sincerity!" **267**
227 When the Shaykh needed paper to continue writing **267**
228 When he said, "Go forth" to the *faqīh* **267**
229 Casting away the ego **268**
230 Chatting when others are in worship **269**
231 Repair what you have ruined **269**
232 The true elixir **270**
233 Stories of those who opposed their egos' desires **271**
234 The Prayer of seeking God's choice **274**
235 The blessed man who wrote down his answers **275**
236 The incident of the oxen **277**
237 The greatest affliction **237**
238 Passing through a threshold **279**
239 The source of joy **279**
240 The remedy for confusion **279**
241 Being lowly like water **280**
242 A definition of Sufism **280**
243 Advice for a woman who is afflicted by whisperings **282**
244 Advice on receiving guests **284**
245 The Prayer (*al-ṣalāt*) **286**
246 Some of the saintly men he met and his teachers **286**
247 On correct comportment and aspiration **295**
248 Breaking normal habits; seeing the Prophet ﷺ **297**
249 A strong foundation **298**
250 On keeping the Prayer in its time **299**
251 Brief counsel **301**
252 Practices of the heart **301**
253 Pretenders and people with the hearts of Prophets (God's blessings and salutations of peace be upon them) **304**
254 Returning to the saying of Shaykh al-Zarrūq ﵁ **354**
255 You will be your own shaykhs **306**
256 Speak only about what is clear; visions at the beginning of his Way **307**
257 Expecting miracles **309**
258 The man who said, "Nothing has appeared to me" **309**
259 "The unique one (*al-fard*)" **310**
260 The Prayer (*al-ṣalāt*) **311**
261 Respect for the shaykh **311**
262 More concerning the Prayer (*al-ṣalāt*) **312**
263 The last words of his shaykh **314**
264 The excellence of knowledge **314**
265 Caution against sharing these writings with everyone **315**
266 What knowledge is most useful **316**
267 Offering the Prayer on time **318**
268 Finding rest in the remembrance of God **319**
269 Rejoice if something in the world is taken from you **320**
270 Invoking the Supreme Name **321**
271 The one needful thing **271**
272 Final words about the Remembrance **325**

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم


Spain
Atlantic Ocean
Mediterranean Sea
Sebta (Ceuta)
Tangier
Tetouan
Ghomara
Mūlay ʿAbd al-Salām ibn Mashīsh
Al Hoceima
Larache
Chefchaouen
Ketāma
Wazzān
Mūlay Bouselham (Abū Salhām)
Banī Zarwāl
Wādī Wargha
Mūlay Bū'shtā al-Khammār
Mūlay Idrīs Zerhūn
Fes
Wādī Sibū

NORTH-WEST MOROCCO

TRANSLATORS' INTRODUCTION

The Shaykh and his land

MŪLAY AL-ᶜARABĪ AL-DARQĀWĪ, the author of the letters translated in the pages to follow, was born in the tribal region of the Banī Zarwāl, in the mountainous northeast of Morocco, around the year 1740 CE. Of this region, one his disciples, Būziyyān al-Muᶜaskarī, would later write: "This blessed and noble land, [the Banī Zarwāl], has many special qualities. Among them is the fact that God has placed therein descendants of all four of the rightly guided Caliphs: our masters Abū Bakr, ᶜUmar, ᶜUthmān, and ᶜAlī, may God be pleased with them and with all the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ. Each of these four has many progeny who live in this region. It is a place where wheat and corn grow, where water flows in abundance, where grapes, olives and many fruits abound, as well as butter, wool, pasturage, and salt mines. [Its people] are known for their virtue, nobility, courage, and generosity. It also has a large number of zāwiyas. It is a land of Qur'anic recitation and spiritual opening..."[1]

The mention here of "recitation" (*al-qira'at*) is not simply generic praise. The mountain people of the northeast seem to have had (and still have) a particular zeal for learning the variants of Qur'anic recitation, and Būziyyān specifies that as a boy, Mūlay al-ᶜArabī learned this and other basic religious knowledge from his older brother, ᶜAlī Abū'l-Ḥasan. "I learned from [my brother]," Būziyyān quotes the Shaykh as saying, "everything from the alphabet up to the Ibn Kathīr recitation..."[2] He goes on to add that Mūlay al-ᶜArabī's youth was thus spent "… in recitation and in making visits to God's saints, living and dead, and this was something he never gave up throughout his life …. He would shop in the marketplaces and attend celebrations and gatherings for the purpose of asking people well-versed in *qira'at* about things of which he was not certain, or to ask people well-versed in *fiqh* about things he needed to know. He was never too lazy, too proud, or too shy to ask."[3]

---

[1] Al-Muᶜaskarī, *Kanz al-asrār,* page 4. This hagiography, written by a man who was a disciple of the Shaykh for 20 years, is one of the primary sources for the biography written by Ibn al-Khiyyāṭ (d. 1342/1923) which was later added to the beginning of some collections of the Shaykh's letters. As of this writing, al-Muᶜaskarī's 110-page work exists only in manuscript form.

[2] The Shaykh also mentions learning from his brother in letter 246. The Ibn Kathīr to whom he refers is the reciter (*al-qāri'*) ᶜAbdallāh ibn Kathīr al-Qurayshī

Other biographic details of the Shaykh's youth are largely unknown, apart from the saintly people he considered his teachers (recounted in letter 246), but from letter 148 we learn that he was in Fes studying religious knowledge at the Madrasa al-Maṣbāḥiyya in the 1170s AH (ca. 1756 CE), and from letters 50 and 271 we learn that around the year 1769 CE, he underwent a transformative and on-going experience of the Divine so powerful that it left him desperate to find a spiritual master. Later that same year, as he mentions in his introduction to these letters, he met the amazing gnostic and teacher, Sīdī ᶜAlī al-Jamal, who almost immediately imparted to him the litany and *dhikr*, and set about giving him and a few other disciples daily lessons in the science of the Way (*ᶜilm al-taṣawwūf*).[4] "God graced me with the love of this saint for two whole years," Shaykh al-Darqāwī writes, "and after that I returned to the region of the Banī Zarwāl where I am from, and would visit him [in Fes] two or three times a year…".

Būziyyān's account of the Shaykh's leaving Fes adds that Sīdī ᶜAlī gave permission "to him and his children" to return,[5] from which we can surmise that Mūlay al-ᶜArabī had married and fathered children while he was still in his own native region and then had brought his wife and children to Fes during the time he was studying there.[6] From letter 60, we learn that he

---

(d. 120/737), not to be confused with the Qur'anic exegete (*al-mufassir*), Ismaᶜīl Ibn Kathīr (d. 780/1373), author of the well-known Qur'anic commentary.

[3] Al-Muᶜaskarī, p. 16.

[4] Some of these teachings were later put in writing in Sīdī ᶜAli's own book, *Naṣīḥatu'l-murīd fī ṭarīq ahli l-sulūki wa'l-tajrīd* ("Counsel for an aspirant in way of method and withdrawal (from the world)" also known by the title *Al-yawāqīt al-ḥissān fī taṣrīf maᶜānī al-insān*, ("Beautiful gems explaining the meanings of man.")

[5] Al-Muᶜaskarī, pp. 63-64

[6] From other sources, we know that the Shaykh's wife was named Mariam, and that

was hesitant to return to his land and to part with his teacher for fear of being spiritually isolated. "I said to him, 'There is no one there [in Banī Zarwāl] with whom to share the Way, and the Way is maintained through companionship.' He answered me, 'Give birth to them!' as if this figurative birth could come about through me or as if he had already seen it. I repeated what I had said to him, and again he said, 'Give birth to them!'"

This meant, among other things, that starting with his return to the Banī Zarwāl in 1771 CE, Mūlay al-ᶜArabī was acting as his master's spiritual representative (*muqaddam*), and as such, in around 1778 CE, he supervised the building of the first zāwiya of the order in that region in a village called Bū Briḥ. This turned out to be somehow prescient since in the following year Sīdī ᶜAlī passed away in Fes[7] and the center of his order, even though there were still *fuqarā'* in Fes, shifted to Banī Zarwāl. Several letters attest to the fact that the Shaykh al-Darqāwī was, in fact, giving spiritual instruction to the brethren in Fes from his zāwiya in the mountains.

In the years that followed, the *Ṭarīqat al-Darqāwiyya* undoubtedly attracted many followers among the mountain people, but it was not until it was graced by three key figures that its expansion would truly begin. In 1782, a charismatic wandering Sufi from Ghomāra named Muḥammad al-Būzīdī (d. 1813 CE) became the Shaykh's first *muqaddam*, after having met him in Fes and travelled back with him to the Banī Zarwal. Then in 1793 CE, both al-Būzīdī and the Shaykh met the famous Tetouani scholar, Sīdī Aḥmad ibn ᶜAjība (d. 1224/1809) who was returning from Fes and had decided to stop at the zāwiya to meet the Shaykh. Sīdī Ibn ᶜAjība would formally enter the Ṭarīqa some time later at the hand of al-Būzīdī, to whom the Shaykh al-Darqāwī gave the task of instructing him in the Way.[8]

With the addition of Ibn ᶜAjība, the Ṭarīqa took an important step toward including not only people from the countryside, but also from the urban centers. The notion that a great scholar, steeped in every aspect

---

his three sons were Mūlay Muḥammad, Mūlay ᶜAlī, and Mūlay Ṭayyib, all of whom are still venerated in region of Banī Zarwāl.

[7] Post, *Two Sufi Commentaries*, p. 27.

[8] Ibid., p. 13 ff.

of Islamic knowledge, would don a coarse wool jellaba and a large rosary (*tasbīḥ*) and set out on the path at the age of around forty must have made a deep impression on many people of Tetouan, but not one that would have necessarily attracted the elite (*al-khāṣṣ*) of the city.

This did not take place until some years later, when another respected Tetouani scholar, Muḥammad al-Ḥarrāq (d. 1845 CE) also entered the order. His particular destiny was to be brought to the door of Sufism by way of tribulation. After having been considered the greatest religious authority in Tetouan, sent from Fes by the sultan himself, Mūlay Sulaymān, al-Ḥarrāq was to see his reputation destroyed by the machinations of certain envious people to such a degree that in order to keep the peace, the same sultan had no choice but to remove him from all his duties. At the same time, he was struck by an illness that lasted for weeks and brought him close to death. It was in this state that al-Ḥarrāq met the Shaykh al-Darqāwī[9] who immediately received him into the order. In fact, when he was questioned about how quickly he was ready to impart so much to al-Ḥarrāq, he answered, "Sīdī Muḥammad al-Ḥarrāq came with the oil already in the lamp. I only lit the wick."[10] He also saw that the trials and illness that al-Ḥarrāq had recently experienced were enough for him to dispense with the kind of rigorous practices aimed at breaking through an aspirant's pride and selfishness that Ibn ᶜAjība or the Shaykh himself had undergone. Thus, al-Ḥarrāq was not asked to don any special garb, to beg, or to follow the way of *tajrīd*, and it is possibly because of this permission that a door was opened to others who were attracted to the Way but not able to able to follow such an austere and rigorous path. Moreover, al-Ḥarrāq, a man steeped in Andalusian culture, counted poetry and spiritual music among the many sciences and skills he had learned, and this added a possibility to the Ṭarīqa that held great appeal for the people of Tetouan and Fes as well.[11]

Whatever be the specific reason, starting with al-Ḥarrāq, the Ṭarīqa began to undergo a period of extraordinary expansion, reaching beyond the borders of Morocco. Ibn al-Khiyyāṭ[12] mentions that "... by the time the Shaykh al-Darqāwī died (in 1823), he had trained 40,000 disciples, all of whom could guide others to God."[13] Another indication of the extent to which the order spread is the fact that over half the biographies of scholars who lived after 1830 mentioned in *Salwat al-anfās*, the famous hagiography of Fes, are devoted to members of the Darqāwiyya.[14] Following the Shaykh's death, the Ṭarīqa's expansion and permutation continued under different teachers, each adding his own special perfume to the basic teachings. Notable among these was the renowned teacher, Shaykh Muṣṭāfa al-ᶜAlawī (d. 1934), founder of the *Ṭarīqa al-Shādhiliyya al-Darqāwiyya al-ᶜAlawiyya*, which was reported to have had as many as 200,000 followers in the east of the Muslim world by 1934,[15] and Sīdī Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥabīb (d. 1972), founder of the *Ṭarīqa al-Shādhiliyya al-Darqāwiyya al-Ḥabībiyya*. Both of these orders, besides spreading across the Muslim world, would eventually attract even westerners, mainly converts to Islam in Europe, the United Kingdom, and America.

---

[9] *Al-Muṭrib*, p. 230

[10] Ibid. p. 231

[11] To this day, the odes of Shaykh al-Ḥarrāq are among the best-known Andalusian songs in Morocco.

The Darqāwiyya and the Sultan of Morocco

During the Shaykh's long life, Morocco was ruled by four different ᶜAlawī sultans. The first of these, Sīdī Muḥammad ibn ᶜAbdallāh, who came into power in 1757 CE when the Shaykh was around twenty, is mentioned in several of the letters with respect and even fondness.[16] The Shaykh's relationship with Sīdī Muḥammad's son, Mūlay Sulaymān,[17] however, was quite another story. Mūlay Sulaymān, whose reign began in 1792 CE upon the death of his brother Yazīd after the latter's brief and strife-ridden two years in power, is viewed by Moroccan historians as a pious, scholarly, and largely fair ruler, but at the same time, someone who might have been better suited to a life of worship and books than to the exercise of temporal power.

---

[12] See footnote 1 of these notes.

[13] *Al-Rasā'il*, Barūd edition, page 56.

[14] Post, p. 11.

[15] Lings, p. ix.

[16] See especially letter 215. Sīdī Muḥammad ibn ᶜAbdallāh is also remembered as the Moroccan ruler who in 1777 wrote a letter to George Washington opening Morocco's ports to the new nation. This was eventually followed by the friendship treaty ratified with Thomas Jefferson that made Morocco the first foreign power to recognize the United States as a sovereign nation.

[17] This name is pronounced in Morocco as *Slīmān*.

To put his reign in perspective, it is necessary to keep in mind that starting from the end of the Marinid dynasty in the late 15th century CE, the zāwiyas of most Sufi orders in Morocco had become not only places for spiritual instruction, general learning, and social welfare, but also for governance and defense. Even in times when there were effective rulers, the shaykh or *muqaddam* of a Sufi order would often be more respected than an administrator appointed by the palace, especially in the countryside. Moreover, there were areas of the country too remote to be administered from a single capital, and so it became a question of expediency for the sultan to delegate certain powers to the *ṭuruq*.[18] In short, any ruler who came into power needed to navigate a course that would not put the central authority of the palace, the *makhzān*, in direct conflict with the Sufi orders.

It appears that from early on in his reign, Mūlay Sulaymān's relation to the *ṭuruq* was mixed. He himself, it is recorded, admired the Sufism taught by the Naṣiriyya and some historians assert that at one point he even became a member of that order.[19] He had also met Shaykh Aḥmad al-Tijānī (d. 1815 CE) who at the time was living as his honored guest in Fes and the Sultan was so impressed by his piety and learning that he invited him to become a part of Morocco's council of scholars.[20] Later, however, in 1808, he found it necessary to actually march against certain tribes aligned with the *Ṭarīqa Sharqawiyya* in the central plains of the country, and this was closely followed, in around 1810 CE, by a confrontation with *Wazzaniyya*, centered in the town of Wazzān (Ouezzane) in the southern foothills of the Rīf.[21]

It is beyond the scope of this introduction to go into all the complexities of Mūlay Sulaymān's relationship with the orders, but an event which helps explain one aspect of the monarch's personal disposition towards Sufism happened in 1811 CE when he received an official letter from ᶜAbdallāh ibn Saᶜūd, the ruler of Arabia, calling the Sultan and by extension the people of Morocco to the Wahhābī point of view. This movement had become established in Arabia several years before when the preacher and reformist, Muḥammad ibn ᶜAbd al-Wahhāb (d. 1792 CE), formed an alliance with Muḥammad ibn Saᶜūd, thus adding the stamp of religious reform to the political goal of taking back control of Arabia from the Ottoman Empire. A large part of the Wahhābī call had to do with ridding Muslim lands of what the Wahhābī's considered *bidᶜa*, reprehensible innovations that had entered the religion, principal among which were the shrines built around the tombs of earlier saintly people, and which in Morocco were nearly always connected to Sufism. In fact, from the Wahhābī point of view, most of the practices of Sufism in Morocco of that day (and of this day as well) would come under the same heading of *bidᶜa*.[22]

---

[18] El Mansour, Mohamed. *Morocco in the Reign of Mawlay Sulayman*, Middle Eastern and North African Studies Press, Cambridgeshire: 1990, p. 164.

[19] El Mansour, p. 162.

[20] Ibid. p. 172. Al-Tijānī had fled persecution by the Turks in Algeria in 1798 CE. The practice of Moroccan kings giving protection to scholars or Sufi shaykhs who have become refugees from their own lands continues to this day with the Syrian shaykh, Muḥammad al-Yaqūbī, who is living as an honored guest of His Majesty Mohamed VI in Rabat.

[21] Ibid. pp. 160-167.

Given the fact that the letter came from the guardian of Mecca and Medina, where pilgrims from all Muslim lands would travel to complete the rites of Pilgrimage (*al-Ḥājj*), and given the fact that Moroccan pilgrims had already had some serious confrontations with Wahhābī authorities some years before,[23] the letter needed to be given careful consideration. After arranging for a delegation of Moroccans that included his own son to make the Pilgrimage and speak to the ruler, Mūlay Sulaymān seemed to become ever more convinced of the correctness of the Wahhābī message and it was around this time that he wrote his famous sermon, to be read in mosques throughout the kingdom, that attacked many Sufi practices of the day in a language that was nearly identical to that of the Wahhābīs.[24]

It is impossible for us to know, looking back on events that happened 200 years ago, whether Mūlay Sulaymān was deeply convinced that the Wahhābī approach was right, or whether he viewed it first as a means to undermine the power of the Sufi orders in Morocco, but it is certain that his stance only aggravated an already tenuous rapport between him and his people.

---

[22] Mouline, p. 63. To see how completely opposed this point of view is to what the Shaykh al-Darqāwī taught, see letters 76 and 145.

[23] Heck, "An early response to Wahhabisim from Morocco," p. 244.

[24] The text of this famous sermon can be found on-line at http://ar.islamway.net/article/33961/

By 1820, tensions came to a head in the Fes Rebellion, a movement arising from deep discontent on the part of the people of Fes with many of the ruler's policies and administrators in their city. It was in that same year, in September, that a letter arrived from the Sultan from Azaghar in the Souss, over 500 miles away, written ostensibly in response to complaints from the people of Fes, that included the line "I ask God to complete what remains of my life in the best way and replace me well among the Muslims. If I remove myself from this matter (*in akhrajtu hādha'l-amr ᶜan nafī*), there have been those better than I who have done likewise, such as al-Ḥasan ibn ᶜAlī, head of the children of Fāṭima al-Zahrā'."[25] He also advised the people of Fes to take responsibility for their own security by seeking an alliance with the Berber tribes as they had done years before.

This letter, sent to three of the leading scholars of Fes to be conveyed to all, was understood by most—but not all—people in Fes to mean that Sultan was abdicating, and in the midst of the resulting uncertainty and the possibility of strife, they decided to pledge their allegiance (*bayᶜa*) to Mūlay Ibrāhīm, the Sultan's nephew, and to turn indeed to the Berber tribes for defense, an alliance that would inevitably involve hundreds of members of the Darqāwa. This may very well have been an unwilling alliance for many of them, and especially for the Shaykh himself who, as we see again and again thoughout the letters, stressed non-involvement in worldly affairs, but when such movements start, they tend to take on a life of their own. This rebellion came to an abrupt end when Mūlay Ibrāhīm unexpectedly passed away in 1821 CE and Mūlay Sulaymān returned from the south and began reasserting his authority. Supporting him in this was the powerful army of the Oudaya tribe who had for centuries put their military skills behind whoever was the ruler of Morocco. History has not preserved the exact details of the event, but in 1822, members of the Oudaya made the decision to arrest and imprison Shaykh al-Darqāwī, by this time a man in his mid-80s. Did they think that it would be a way to have leverage over the members of the Darqāwī order aligned with the rebellion? Was it on the orders of the Sultan himself or simply their own decision? Did Mūlay Sulaymān, who was at the time deeply involved in restoring order in the kingdom, even know that the Shaykh had been imprisoned? These questions are not answered clearly by historical sources at hand, but it is recorded that during that year, the Shaykh told one of his followers, "I will leave this prison when Mūlay Sulaymān's rule comes to an end."

---

[25] El Mansour, *Al-Maghrib qabla'-l-istiᶜmār*, p. 317.

Such indeed proved to be the case. The Sultan died in November of the same year, 1822 CE, and the Shaykh was released from prison to live out his final year in the reign of Mūlay ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān, another nephew of Mūlay Sulaymān. Būziyyān writes in *Kanz al-asrār* "When his death was near, he began to counsel us much and urge us to counsel one another ... [to keep the practices he had been teaching] ... and he would swear by God, 'If you follow my counsel, God will revive both the land and its people through you, for this is the Way of the Folk رضي الله عنهم which has nearly disappeared. If you give it new life, God will give you new life.'"[26] After over fifty years of calling people to the remembrance of God, the Shaykh left this world surrounded by family and friends on the 8th of Safar, 1239 AH (mid-October of 1823 CE). Al-Muᶜaskarī, who was present at the Shaykh's death, mentions that his wife Maryam washed and shrouded her husband's body which was then buried in the old zāwiya built in Bū Brīḥ, in the region of Banī Zarwāl,[27] *Raḥīmahu'l-Lāh!*

The Letters

The spiritual way which the Shaykh was convinced could "revive both the land and its people" was taught through personal contact to those who were able to live near the Shaykh (letters 130 and 154). For the many who lived too far away, however, the teachings were largely conveyed through letters which the Shaykh had begun to write at the behest of his own shaykh, Sīdī ᶜAlī al-Jamal, shortly after having met him in 1769 CE[28] and continued to write throughout his life. We can assume from present day practice that a letter or part of a letter would be read some time during a gathering of group invocation, probably after the recitation of the litany, by a person whom the Shaykh had appointed his *muqaddam* in the area. It is almost certain that these letters were read with some explanation added by the reader and at times they might also be followed a session of *mud-*

---

[26] Al-Muᶜaskarī, 8-9.

[27] *Ibid.* pp. 3-4.

[28] See the Shaykh's introduction to these letters.

hākarāt, or "spiritual dialogue" as described in letter 92. During the life of the Shaykh, they were presumably copied out by hand many times, and after his death in 1823 CE, they were collected and sent to numerous zāwiyas throughout Morocco. The first lithograph edition was done in Fes in 1900 and others soon followed, but it was not until after the beginning of the French Protectorate in 1912 that moveable type presses for Arabic finally allowed editions that people other than well-off scholars could afford.[29] The Arabic version of these letters continues to be published and re-published in Morocco and elsewhere, and as of this writing, a new edition of the letters based on four separate manuscripts and edited by one of the Shaykh's direct living descendants, is about to printed in Morocco.

Some Distinctive Themes of the Letters

These letters touch on nearly every conceivable aspect of the Sufic path. In addition to spiritual advice, the Shaykh shares personal details of his own journey, including its low points. Fifty-seven of the letters from 173 to 236 recount events which happened to the Shaykh over his long lifetime, but considering only those which directly express spiritual teachings, we can identify seven main themes which appear and re-appear throughout. These are:

1 **The balance between the revealed law (*al-sharīᶜa*) and esoteric truth (*al-ḥaqīqa*).** A characteristic of North African Sufism in general and the Shādhiliyya path in particular is its insistence upon the necessity of respecting the revealed law, which in practice means carefully maintaining formal worship considered obligatory for all Muslims such as the Prayer (*al-ṣalāt*),[30] and the fast, and refraining from what is considered both forbidden and disapproved by the religion. This insistence

---

[29] See Fawzi, "Printing as an agent for change in Morocco, 1864-1912," pp. 31 *ff*, where he points out that lithographs were too costly for an average person in Morocco.

One of the Arabic sources we have used for the translation which follows is an offset copy of a lithograph dated 1334 H. (1917).

[30] Throughout the translation that follows, we have used the word "Prayer," with a capital P, to denote *al-ṣalāt*, the formal Muslim rite of worship comprised of standing, recitation, bowing, prostrating, and various formulas of praise and remembrance. This is to distinguish it from *duʿa*, which can also be translated as "prayer," but in the sense of a personal supplication to God.

runs through all of the Shaykh's letters, sometimes as a stated principle (letters 51 and 165, for example) and sometimes as a practical prescriptions, such as in letters 1, 93, 242, and 245, where he mentions the importance of performing the ablution with care.

While for some who read these letters the juxtaposition of ritual purity and spiritual virtue might appear jarring, for a person such as the Shaykh, who had ceased to see any discontinuity between the outward and the inward, it was perfectly harmonious.

2 **The experience of the divine**. As we have mentioned above, when the Shaykh was in his twenties, he had a powerful and transformative experience of God which set him firmly of the path and which reappears in various allusions throughout the letters. The Sufi terms *dhawq* ("taste"), *sukr* (intoxication), *mushāhada* (contemplation), *shuhūd* (vision, perception), mentioned in letters 6, 14, 48, 55, 82, 110, and especially letters 91 and 133, all refer to modes of directly experiencing the Divine, which the Shaykh teaches is both the beginning and goal of the Way. Such an experience may come in a moment of ecstasy (*wajd,* which is a form of the verb *wajada*, "to find") that sometimes overwhelms an aspirant, particularly during some form of *dhikr*, and temporarily robs him of his senses (mentioned in letters 6, 66, 126 and others), but in its highest form, it is an on-going station, eloquently described in letter 133, in which the aspirant comes to view reality with different eyes and is able to see the face of the Divine running through all creation. Whether this vision comes by being seized with ecstasy or through a collected methodic practice, however, the Shaykh reminds us that it is always an action of grace.

3 **Remembrance or invocation**. *Dhikru Llāh* is the method par excellence by which an aspirant may open his or her heart to the experience of the divine and the action of grace referred to above. This term can be applied to a wide range of practices, including the recitation of the Qur'ān or of litanies, alone or in a group, silently or aloud, but the most direct method imparted to the Shaykh by his shaykh was the invocation of the Supreme Name, *Allāh*, in the manner described in letters 13, 178 and 272. This method, followed by permission of a shaykh, acts by divine grace when the veils of the heart—which means

the world and the ego—have been completely or partially lifted and the invoker has realized in his or her soul some degree of virtue. As the Shaykh writes to one of his *muqaddams* in letter 68: "Do not charge someone who comes to you with constantly repeating *Allāh... Allāh...Allāh* or constantly praying, or constantly fasting while he passionately loves the world and loves idle chatter. Rather, charge him with accomplishing the obligatory worship and the confirmed *sunna*, staying away from what does not concern him, and developing noble character. Then if he invokes God's Name one time, or offers one Prayer, or recites one sūra, or the like...and does so with the noble state we have mentioned, it will be better for him that doing things a thousand times with the reprehensible state of loving the world, indulging in idle chatter, and drowning in error—and may God deliver us all!"

4 **The soul vis-à-vis the world**. The terms *faqr, tajrīd, kharq al-ᶜāda, tark mā lā yaᶜanīh* (spiritual poverty, withdrawal from the mundane world, breaking one's normal habits, and abandoning what does not concern one) all refer to the relationship between the aspirant's soul and the veil of the external world. Aspirants in the Sufi way, especially in the terminology of the Darqāwa, are always referred to as *fuqarā'*, literally, "those who are poor or needy," but which means in the context of the Way "those who maintain an inward emptiness for God." *Tajrīd*, for its part, is a practice which the Shaykh would ask most (but not all) of the *fuqarā'* to take up (see letters 9 and 123 in particular). This term, which literally means "stripping away," in practice meant giving up their involvement in the workaday world, including their means of earning a living, all of which is seen to be "secondary causes" (*al-asbāb*). In addition, *tajrīd* for both for the Shaykh al-Darqāwī and his shaykh, Sīdī ᶜAlī al-Jamal, meant exchanging one's normal garb for some form of the patched robe, *al-muraqqaᶜa* (see letter 5). Both of these practices of *tajrīd* are forms of *kharq al-ᶜāda*—breaking normal habits—which affect our relationship to the world and to our own egos (see below). Lastly, this inner emptying in respect to the world cannot be complete without following the Prophet's ﷺ advice found in the famous *ḥadith*, first quoted in letter 1 and alluded to again and again throughout these letters, "Among the best ways a person can practice Islam is to avoid

what does not concern him."

It is important to add, however, that for the Shaykh, the way of poverty, renunciation, and withdrawal from the world was not primarily for the purpose of self-mortification, but rather as a way of emptying oneself inwardly for the contemplation of God. Sīdī Aḥmad ibn ʿAjība writes concerning this "practical" aspect of detachment, "I have heard our master's master, Mūlay al-ʿArabī al-Darqāwī ﵁, say, 'The meditation of one who has abandoned the mundane, workaday world, is sharper,' that is, clearer and more far-reaching 'than the mediation of one who is in the world.' That is because it arises from clarity (*al-ṣafā*), for inward clarity comes from outward clarity, just as inward turbidity comes from outward turbidity."[31]

5 **The soul vis-à-vis its own selfishness.** *Qatl al-nafs*, "slaying the ego," refers to the relationship of the aspirant with the other thing which veils him or her from knowing and experiencing God: the ego and its desires. In most of these letters, the term *nafs* is used in the sense of the Qur'anic verse, *Surely the soul commands to evil* [12:53]. It was to weaken this selfish, vain, and covetous aspect of the soul that both Shaykh al-Darqāwī's shaykh, Sīdī ʿAlī al-Jamal, he himself, and his *muqaddam* al-Būzīdī would assign certain new aspirants to the Way menial and demeaning tasks (see letter 3) which could produce a psychic rupture and allow an amazing influx of spiritual insight, as the Shaykh describes in that same letter.[32] What we have mentioned concerning humble clothes and breaking habits also concerns this sense of self.

Such exercises could be seen as modalities of *al-fanā'*, "passing away, extinction, self-effacement," a term which arises from verse 27 of sūra 55, The Compassionate: *All that is upon (the earth) passes away* (fān). Everything which is heavy on the ego (as he mentions in letters 5, 131, 145, 156 and others) has, as its goal, this self-effacement. At the same time, experiences of the divine mentioned above, also result in this station, as the Shaykh mentions in his introduction, quoting Abū Saʿīd ibn al-Aʿrābī (see biographical index): "This (experience) effaces him from everything: from his own mind and individual self, from his effacement, and the effacement of his effacement, and it drowns him in the oceans of Divine Immensity." *Fanā'* is thus both a means towards and a fruit of experiencing the divine.

---

[31] See Post and Fitzgerald, *Two Sufi Commentaries*, p. 174.

[32] See also the introduction to our translation, *The Immense Ocean*, pp. xviii-xix.

6 **The concealment of things in their opposites** (*kāminatu'l-ashyā'i fī aḍādihā*). This doctrine, expressed in detail in letter 31 and repeated several times after that, was passed on to the Shaykh by his own master, Sīdī ᶜAlī al-Jamal, who mentions it numerous times in his own writings. It is a metaphysical explanation, somewhat reminiscent of Taoist doctrine, of how, through the emptiness and abasement mentioned above, comes plenitude and exaltation.

7 **Noble character, virtue, right comportment** (*makārim al-akhlaq, ḥusnu al-khuluq, al-adab*). The Shaykh views human virtue and right comportment as both a condition and fruit of travelling the spiritual way (letter 33). In several places throughout the letters, as in letter 164, he reminds the *fuqarā'* "[to] treat one another and all people with respect and modesty, with excellence of character, with the best opinion of them, and without cupidity ..." In letter 149, he is even more adamant: "[There is no] meaning to our spiritual efforts if our character remains bad," and conversely, in letter 86, he states that "... it is impossible for someone to see his Lord and have bad character ..." That is, if an aspirant is granted the vision or perception of the divine, spoken of above, it means that the veils of egoism and worldliness have been lifted, which is another way of saying that the lamp of the heart has been polished clean and that the innate light (*nūr al-fiṭra*), which is continuous with God's qualities, shines forth from within in the form of virtue.

The Darqāwī message today

The Darqāwī order during much of the life of the Shaykh was a rigorous path, stressing withdrawal from worldly life, giving up conventions, and leading a life of invocation and worship. In respect to this and to the other themes mentioned above, one could well ask what, if any, is the application of these teachings for seekers of today? To give some sort of answer to this question, one needs first to distinguish between what is *Ṭarīqa* and what is *Ḥaqīqa*. The *Ṭarīqa*, in the sense of a method to spiritual realization, can change with the realities and people of any given time.

During the Shaykh's time, from the mid-1700s into the beginning of the 19th century, North African Sufism was very much characterized by the methods mentioned above to break down the strong sense of pride and egoism that might have been natural to people, especially men, of that time. The Shaykh himself recounts how humiliating it was for him to be asked to carry baskets of mulberries on his shoulders in letter 3, or to have his headcloth suddenly pulled off his head by his teacher in letter 179. These are the words of a man born into an educated family who was also considered a *sharīf*, a noble, who had enjoyed an honored position in the Moroccan society of his day. While donning a patched robe might have had been heavy for the egos of people in Morocco two hundred years ago, today the wearing any special clothes at all could just as easily be an expression of the ego. The Shaykh, in fact, speaks of this (see letter 5 and footnote 212) pointing out why "spiritual training by usage" might no longer be operative.

On the other hand, these letters abound in spiritual counsel which is independent of time and place. When the Shaykh reiterates the notion that the more we are involved in the sensory dimension (*al-ḥissi*), the more we are drawn away from the spiritual dimension (*al-maᶜānī*), or his insistence, starting in letter 1, that those who follow him should genuinely put into practice the *ḥadīth*, "Among the best ways a person can practice Islam is to avoid what does not concern him," he is stating principles of the Way that can benefit anyone, and perhaps now more than ever in an age when people might spend hours of their lives each day browsing the internet without purpose. And in letter 97, where the Shaykh asks the aspirant to set aside some time each day, "free from any other preoccupations or egoistic purposes," in which to which to remember God in some way, he is imparting advice for any seeker at any time who wishes for a deeper connection to the Divine. Even the letters which recount what the Shaykh considered God's actions in his life teach us how to see the divine in the smallest things, or as he puts it in letter 121, quoting Dhū'l-Nūn al-Miṣrī when someone asked him to show him the Greatest Name of God, "Show me the smallest and I will show you the Greatest."

Previous translations and our work on these letters

Some short extracts from these letters translated into French by the Swiss scholar and mystic, Titus Burchkhardt, and then into English by Martin Lings, first appeared in the Winter 1967 edition of *Studies in Comparative Religion*. That same year, under the title *Letters of a Sufi Master*, a more complete sampling of the letters along with some useful notes was published by Perennial Books. This 38-page book, most recently republished by Fons Vitae Press, Kentucky, in 1998, represents a truly beautiful sample of some select passages in the letters. In the interim, in 1979, an English rendering done by Aisha Bewley of 227 of the letters was published by the Diwan Press, followed by a revised edition containing all 272 letters in 1981. Although this latter edition thus became the first complete translation of the letters into any western language, a number of words and syntactical expressions remained either misunderstood or misread, possibly due to the quality of the copies of the letters in Arabic that were available at the time. Moreover, the collection was published without notes apart from a glossary of Arabic terms which appear in the text in their transliterated forms.

Following this, in 1991, Titus Burkhart's original French translation appeared under the title *Lettres d'un maître soufi*, published by Milano Archè, Milan, and then in 2003, La Caravane editions, Paris, published M. Chabri's excellent French translation of a selection of the letters under the title *Lettres sur la Voie Spirituelle*, complete with extensive endnotes. Chabri's selection, which resulted in a book of nearly 300 pages, included only those letters which did not appear in the original 1969/1991 done by Titus Burckhardt. He also omitted certain letters which he considered repetitive.[33]

The present translation is of all 272 letters found in the two main Arabic versions currently in print. We have worked from three main Arabic sources. The first is a handwritten transcription of the 1917 lithograph mentioned above, done by Sīdī Qasim Budaran of Tlemsan, Algeria, the son of Sīdī ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān al-Tlemsānī (*raḥimahu Llāh*) who was a *muqaddam* of the *Ṭarīqa ᶜAlawiyya* during the life of Shaykh al-ᶜAlawī ؓ. This version was subsequently typed on a computer and both the hand-copied pages and computer text were lent to us by Professor Kenneth Honerkamp of the University of Georgia. The second Arabic source is the printed edition published in Abu Dhabī in 1999 and edited by Bassām al-Bārūd. For the most part, this is an excellent edition with few errors and any words that were not clear were compared both to the 2004 edition printed in Casablanca and the offset reprint of a 1914 Fes lithograph.

---

[33] Close to the publication of this work, we learned that a new translation of all the letters into French by Idris de Vos under the title "Enseignement d'un grand maître soufi: Les lettres de Mulay al-ᶜArabī al-Darqâwî" has just been published by Editions Albouraq.

We have chosen to translate all the letters, even those which seem to repeat subjects already mentioned and which had been omitted from some previous translations, following the Shaykh's own explanation of why he did this in letter 14.

Above all, we have tried to render these letters into a clear, comprehensible English, keeping in mind the fact that they were written in an intimate register of Arabic that could be grasped by most of the Shaykh's disciples. Related to this, we would like to mention that in the majority of cases throughout the letters, the Shaykh uses the first person plural, the "we" form, instead of the first person singular, "I". In Moroccan Arabic, in fact, the first person singular form of the verb in the present tense, which begins with the letter *alif*, is almost never used and is even seen to be somewhat proud such that Moroccans often used to follow the use of the pronoun "*anā*" (= "I" or "me") with the words, *Astaghfir Allāh, qult anā* ("May God forgive me, I said 'I'"). For the Anglophone reader, however since the use of "we" and "our" may sound the opposite of humble, and for this reason we have varied our choice of pronouns to best fit the context. Also related to the readability of the text are the many terms of respect before the names of scholars and saints and the formulas which follow the mention of certain people and places. In some cases we have included these, but when their inclusion has made the English excessively heavy,

Also related to the readability of the text are the many terms of respect before the names of scholars and saints and the formulas which follow the mention of certain people and places. In some cases we have included these, but when their inclusion has made the English excessively heavy, we have omitted them.

In addition to this, we have added the following in order to make the text more accessible to a reader of our time:

1. The original copies of the letters had no numbers. For the sake of referencing, we have followed Bārūd's numbering which puts the actual number of letters at 272.

2. We have also adapted Bārūd's practice of assigning sub-titles to each letter. We consider this useful for a reader who is interested in a particular subject. Our subtitles, however, are not translations of Bārūd's Arabic but rather ones we believe have more meaning for a western reader.

3. We have referenced every Qur'anic verse quoted by sūra and verse number set between brackets [2:2] and have used the recently published *Study Qur'an*, with small modifications, as our source. We have also tried to find sources for the *ḥadīth* quoted in the text as well as certain other sayings and lines of poetry. Since the *Kitāb al-Ḥikam* is quoted so often throughout the letters, we have included the number of the aphorism according to the great Danner translation in brackets in the body of the text rather than adding more footnotes to the already considerable number.

4. We have set two indices for this collection. One is a biographical index in which we have tried to give some background information about most of the people mentioned in the letters, with cross-references back to the letters in which they are mentioned. The names included in this index are followed by a superscript (^{b}) in the body of the text. The second index is a general index and includes Arabic terms and their English equivalents and then the letters in which they are mentioned.

A final word concerning the letters

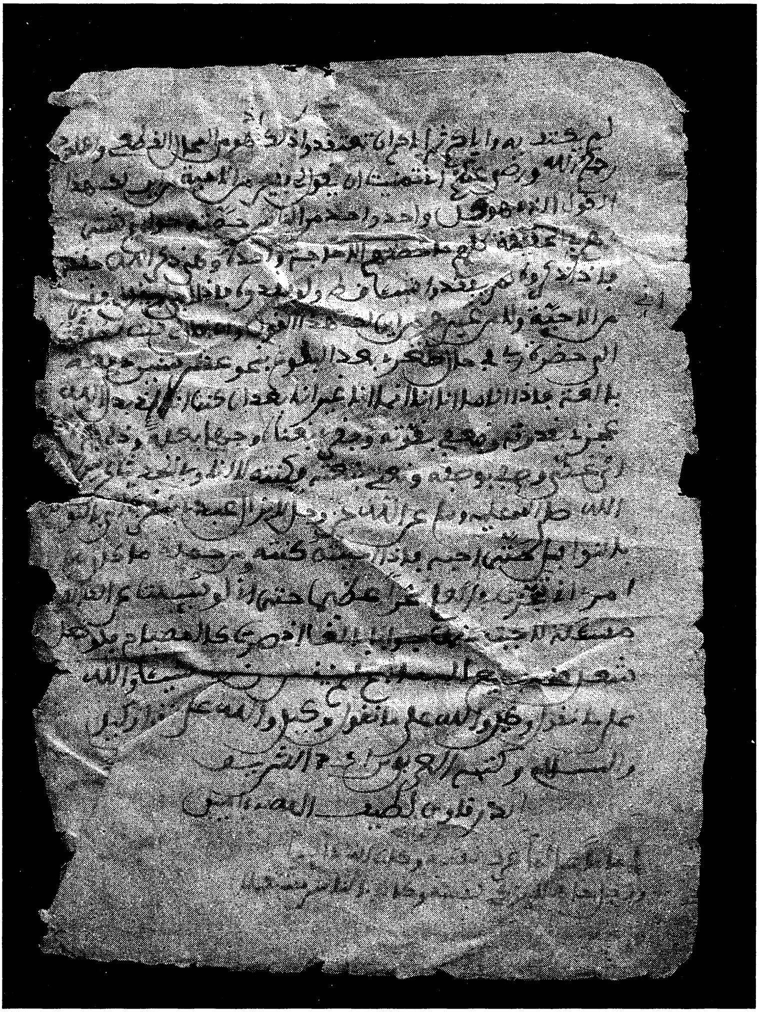
Related to the question of having translated all the letters, we should mention that these letters were first imparted to people who had resolved to follow the Way and who had been formally received into the order by the Shaykh or one of his *maqaddams*. As such, they contain teachings which the Shaykh cautioned the *fuqarā'* against sharing with everyone (see letter 265). Moreover, he describes a method of invoking the Divine Name which was traditionally done with the permission and supervision of a spiritual master. We believe, however, that the need to understand these teachings—which are at the heart of Islam—outweighs other concerns, and this has perhaps never been more true than in a time such as ours.

Acknowledgements

This work could not have seen the light of day without the help of a number of people. As we have mentioned above, one of our principal sources for the Arabic text as well as two manuscripts of Būziyyān's *Kanz al-asrār*, were given to us by Professor Kenneth Honerkamp of the University of Georgia. For this and for help with other references, we are extremely grateful to him. We are grateful as well as to his skilled assistant and student, Mr. Arash Abou Torabi Hamedani, who was indispensible in the task of providing us with copies of important works from thousands of miles away. We would also like to thank our dear brothers and colleagues at the Center for Language and Culture, Brahim Zoubairi and Hamza Weinman, for their support and suggestions, Professor Hicham Rajaʿī of the Faculty of Arabic Language, Marrakesh, for his help with certain Arabic terms, and Dr. Rabitateddine, eminent historian and professor at the Faculty of Letters, Qadi Ayyad University, Marrakesh, for his help with certain historical references. Last but not least, we owe our undying gratitude and love to our families for their patience with a project that demanded many hours over a period of two years to complete.

MOHAMED FOUAD ARESMOUK
MICHAEL ABDURRAHMAN FITZGERALD

Marrakesh, 1 Rabi' al-awwal, 1439
(November 19, 2017)



© PHOTO BY ZAK WHITEMAN

The second page of letter 271 from a manuscript in which this was the ulimate letter. Written in the handwriting of the shaykh with his own signature to which he added the following text:

"A knowledgeable imam who knew himself and always belonged to God; an ignorant man who sought excuses for his ego and was taken up with (other) people"

The Shaykh Al-Darqāwī's introduction to his letters

GOD GRACED HIS SERVANT, al-ᶜArabī ibn Aḥmad al-Sharif al-Darqāwī, from the tribe of Zarwāl, with the acquaintance of the illustrious and noble master, Abū'l-Ḥasan, Sīdī ᶜAlī ibn Sīdī ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ḥasanī al-ᶜAmrānī,[b] in the year 1182 AH in the city of Fes. It was there, too, that the Shaykh passed away ؓ in 1193 AH,[1] and his tomb in the neighborhood of Ramīla is well-known (may God benefit us through his blessing).

His origin was from the Banī ᶜAmrān, *shurafā'*[2] of the Banī Ḥassān. They say that it was the Shaykh's father who migrated to Fes and eventually passed away there, but some say it was his grandfather who first moved there. The Shaykh was nicknamed "the camel" (*al-jamal*) due to an incident that took place in his youth. As a boy, he was exceptionally strong, and it happened that one day when he was walking down one of the roads of Fes, he came upon a young camel asleep in the path and so he picked it up and put it out of the way. Those who saw him do this, (amazed at his strength), said, "That one—*he's* the camel!" and from that time on he became known by that name to the people of Fes. But as we have mentioned, he was a *Ḥasanī ᶜAmrānī sharīf*, and God knows best.

Sīdī ᶜAlī al-Jamal was one of the great masters of the Way, perpetually intoxicated, perpetually sober, for he combined both states within him and was powerful in each of them—and God is a warrant for what I say. He was also among the people who are both inwardly and outwardly detached from the world, and had realized the *tawḥīd* of the elect,[3] like the saint, al-Ḥasan al-Shushtarī,[b] and others like him had (may God be pleased with them and benefit us through their blessings).

---

[1] The two dates are 1769 and 1779 CE respectively.

[2] *Shurafā'*, nobles, is the plural of *sharīf*. In Morocco, a *sharīf* is a descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, generally through his grandson Ḥasan and his great-great grandson, Mūlay Idrīs, buried in Zerhūn, near Meknes. It is a strongly held belief to this day that *shurafā'* possess a special form of *baraka*, or "blessing power."

God graced me with the love of this saint for two whole years, and after that I returned to the region of the Banī Zarwāl where I am from, and would visit him [in Fes] two or three times a year—though people say it was even more—and during each visit I would spend as much time as I could with him to receive his teachings.

When he transmitted to me the litany (*al-wird*), which is "I seek forgiveness from God" one hundred times, "May God bless our master Muḥammad, the Unlettered Prophet, and his family and companions and give them salutations of peace," one hundred times, and "There is no god but God," one thousand times, adding, "Muḥammad is the Messenger of God, may God bless him and his family and give them salutations of peace"[4] after each one hundred repetitions, said after the dawn and sunset Prayers, he said to me ﵁, "For us, this is the method of the people of the outward, the Nāṣiriyya Way, may God be pleased with them." Then he transmitted to me the invocation of the Supreme Name, *Allāh*, without any specific number of times, and said, "For us, this is the method of the people of the inward, the sons of Ibn ᶜAbdallāh,[b] of the Makhfiyya quarter of Fes (may God keep it safe from every tribulation)."

After we were done with that, he said to me, "Go and come!" and that is what I did every day. I would get together with him and some of the brothers of Fes and he would give us spiritual instruction. Such was the way he taught us until his death (may God bless him) and I derived great benefit from his teachings. By way of them, I came to know who was in a state of remembrance and who was in a state of heedlessness, so that I was no longer taken in by someone simply because of his knowledge, or simply because of his practices[5]—for there are people who accomplish a great many acts of worship, but who are nonetheless heedless of God, and there are some who accomplish few acts of worship, but who truly remember God. They are the ones who practice what they know, so that God endows them with the knowledge of what they did not know, according to what has been conveyed [in a *ḥadīth*].[6] This is their merit above others, and this is what is really needed, not the situation of someone who knows a lot but does not act upon his knowledge.

---

[3] Throughout these letters, when the Shaykh uses the term "the elect," he usually means those who are actively following the Sufi path, but in certain contexts it can also mean "the elite," in a worldly sense.

In respect to the term *al-tawḥīd al-khāṣṣ*, Ibn ᶜAjība, who was initiated into the Way by the Shaykh's disciple and representative, Sīdī Muḥammad al-Būzīdī, explains this term in his commentary on the Q. 2:163: "… the *tawḥīd* of the elect (*al-khāṣṣ*)… is to see that all actions originate with God alone, and to perceive this by way of a spiritual unveiling, not by way of the formal proofs which are accessible to every believer.… Those who are granted this knowledge hope only for God and fear none but Him because they see no other Doer except Him (*lā fāᶜil illā Huwa*) and thus dispense with all secondary causes and earthly lords."

[4] That is, *Astaghfir Allāh* (100), *Allāhumma ṣalli ᶜalā Sayyidinā Muḥammad al-Nabiyyi-l-ummiyyi, wa ᶜalā ālihi wa ṣaḥbihi wa sallim taslīma* (100), and *Lā ilāha illa'Llāh* (1000), adding *Muḥammadu-r-Rasūlu-l-Llāh, ṣalla-l-Llāhu ᶜalayhi wa ᶜalā ālih* after each 100.

When I saw the excellence of those spiritual lessons, their inner secret, and their goodness, I began to truly love that time spent learning in the company of people I loved (may God strengthen them and efface them from themselves in Him), for God only gives strength to those who are effaced in Him, even as the imam of the lovers, the friend of God Most High, Sīdī Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar ibn al-Fāriḍ ﵁[b] said in his ode in *tā'*:

> You do not love Me if you are not effaced in Me
> And you will not be effaced until My form has appeared
>   within you.

These are not words he said from himself, but rather from his Lord. As for himself—he had gone with those who had gone, and won with those who had won (may God curse those who lie).

The folk[7] have spoken a great deal about *al-fanā'* (effacement), but its most articulate expression (and God knows best) is in the response of the saint, Abū Saᶜīd ibn al-Aᶜrābī رضي الله عنه[b] when he was asked concerning it and said: "It is when the immensity and greatness [of God] appear to the servant and cause him to forget this world and the Next, forget states, degrees, stations, and invocations, and this effaces him from everything: from his own mind and individual self, from his effacement, and the effacement of his effacement, and it drowns him in the oceans of Divine Immensity." There is also the saying of God's friend, Sīdī Abū al-Mawāhib al-Tūnusī رضي الله عنه[b]: "*Al-fanā'* is effacement, disappearance, leaving yourself behind, and ceasing to exist..."And there are other [like sayings].

---

[5] *Al-aʿmāl* may mean "deeds, works, or actions." In the context of these letters, this word usually refers to visible, formal devotional practices such as the Prayer, fasting, reciting litanies, and so forth.

[6] According to Anas ibn Mālik ﵁, the Messenger of God ﷺ said, "He who acts upon what he knows God will cause to inherit the knowledge of what he does not know." In Abū Nuʿaym's, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*.

[7] *Al-qawm*, a term often used by the Sufis to refer to themselves.

There is no way to enter to enter God's presence except through one of two doors: the door of the greater effacement (*al-fanā' al-akbar*), and that is natural death, or the door of effacement as understood by this group, that is, the Shādhiliyya (may God be pleased with them) even as the saint Abū'l-ᶜAbbās al-Mursī رضي الله عنه[b] said: "O God, open our inner visions and illuminate our souls. Cause us to be effaced from ourselves and sustained by You, not by our own selves."

> If we are with Him we count ourselves honored
> above both freemen and slaves
> And if we return to our own selves,
> our lowliness is greater than that of the Jews.[8]

And in the *Ḥikam* of Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh [124]: "Were He to make you go back to yourself, there would be no end to reasons for blaming you; and were He to Manifest His beneficence toward you, there would no end to reasons for praising you."

It was at this time that my master (Sīdī ᶜAlī) told me to write down the spiritual insights which came to me by inspiration. He said رضي الله عنه, "Whenever a spiritual insight comes to you, be quick to write it down [9] before it escapes, because it comes to you first as huge as a mountain, and if you are quick to write it down, you will seize it as came to you. But if you hesitate, it will return like a camel, and if you hesitate again, it will return like a swallow, and if you hesitate again, it will escape you altogether. You have to tie it to the physical world (by putting it in words) so that it will stay with you. It is like a sheep: if you tie it with a rope, it stays with you, and if not, not. And if it *does* stay with you, then another will come to you, and another, and so forth, and in this way will you and others proceed in the path...like a swimmer who pulls the water first with his right hand, then with his left, and so moves forward through the water and does not stop. The one who does not pull, does not move, and does not advance."

---

[8] These lines are attributed to Abū Bakr ibn ᶜAlī ᶜAbdallāh ibn Muḥammad al-Shaybānī (d. 830/1426). Besides poetry, he left works of Sufism such as *Ādāb al-Murīdīn* and *al-Durratu al-Muḍiyya wa'l-Wiṣāyā al-ḥikmiyya*.

[9] The verb used here, *qayyada*, literally means "to tie something up." It is the principal verb still used in Morocco to mean "write something down."

This is what he said to me (may God be pleased with him) and this is why I began to write down (some of) the spiritual teachings which came to me by inspiration—but not always, just at certain times, because if I had written them all down, they would have been too much, and I dislike too much talk, which is of little use to people. If there is good intention and aspiration, then the smallest amount of teaching will suffice, and if not, not.

So here I want to gather whatever I can of my writings for the benefit of those who love me during my life and after my death. In doing this I hope there will be blessing and excellence—for in gathering together there is blessing and excellence. I hope too that our way will be made clear to those who follow us and to those who want to. There may also be people to whom these teachings will bring joy, and there is great reward in bringing joy to the faithful.

In addition, it may be that those scholars of formal knowledge who reject our path will find precious gems in these teachings if they reach their hands and will return from their state of rejection to a state of acceptance, and from heedlessness to remembrance. If that were to happen, we would be a means by which mercy comes to them, and "Those who are merciful are given mercy by God."[10] By the blessing of the people of the Way ﵃, these letters will not be lacking in gems of knowledge.

---

[10] *Ḥadīth* found in the *Musnad* of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, and as well as in Tirmidhī, Abū Dāwūd, Ḥākim, and other collections.

I once saw in a dream that I was in Fes al-Bālī (may God maintain it). It was in the 1200s and in the dream a certain king gave me a sheath of bound pages. I opened it and, behold, it was full of many jewels. The king I saw was the master of the people of our western land and the master of others, Mūlay Idrīs,[b] son of Mūlay Idrīs, son of Mūlay ᶜAbdallāh al-Kāmil, son of Mūlay al-Ḥasan al-Muthannā, son of al-Ḥasan al-Sibṭ, son of the greatest imam, the evident and eminent secret, our guardian ᶜAlī ibn Ṭālib, رضي الله عنه.[b] [11] Because I used to visit (that shrine to supplicate God) for knowledge, it became clear to me when I interpreted this dream that the king I saw (symbolized) God سبحانه وتعالى and the jewels were knowledge—and God knows better.

On the eve of the day on which I met the Shaykh and received from him the litany and the Supreme Name, *Allāh*, I dreamed of the same imam I have mentioned, our guardian ᶜAlī, رضي الله عنه, at the tomb of Mūlay Idrīs the younger رضي الله عنه. I took his blessed hand and went with him to the Miṣbāḥiyya school to honor him and upon reaching the street of the candle-makers, I awoke from my sleep. I told the Shaykh what I had seen and he said to me, "Rejoice at this great good, for you are among the people of Sufism (may God be pleased with them)." He said this because imam ᶜAlī رضي الله عنه is the imam of the Sufis, the greatest of them, and their spiritual pole.

Following this, for several days, a state of contraction came over me that was so strong that it nearly robbed me of my religion, and as for any claims to Sufism, it took those away from me completely and left me far from it. Then I turned to my Lord in utter need and set off for the shrine of the eminent saint, Sīdī Abū al-Shitā' al-Khammār,[b] [12] (may God سبحانه وتعالى benefit us through him). I spent the night there reciting the Book of God سبحانه وتعالى, but without my heart, only my tongue, for I had nothing left of my heart except a name. When I completed the Qur'ān from beginning to end, I turned to God Most High in utter desperation and need and asked Him to relieve me of the state that had afflicted me. Then I was seized by a deep sleep and I saw in a dream that I was reciting *Sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ* [Q. 28] with an illiterate man—someone who would not recognize his own name written on a slate—and I was doing so in a slow and extended style in a loud voice. Then I awoke and I was in the shrine. (Later) I consulted (the book on dream interpretation by) Ibn Manṣūr and found something that filled me with upmost joy. For he said, quoting al-Kirmānī ؓ[b]: "The recitation of *Sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ* in a dream means the attainment of knowledge, understanding, and correctness regarding people." That was confirmed for me later, by the grace of God, and may thanks be to God.

---

[11] *Mūlay*, a transcription of the Moroccan pronunciation of *mawlāya* ("my lord"), is an honorary title used in Morocco before the name of a man who is a *sharīf* (see footnote 2). The equivalent for women is *Lalla*.

[12] A little over 40 miles from Fes.

These, my teachings, are many. For me, they are not always addressed to one particular person among those who follow me. Rather, sometimes they are for one, sometimes for more than one, and sometimes for all of them (may God be pleased with them) and I did not collect them until their excellence, spiritual secret, goodness, and benefit appeared to me—and God is a warrant for what I say.

A person of intelligence should not write down anything that is unacceptable to people's reason. If it is not something people can understand, then it should not be put in writing, for the Prophet ﷺ said, "Speak to people according to their understandings."[13] Moreover, if someone's own inner adversary disputes something, he should not write it down, for it is sure that his adversary among other men will not accept it either. The greatest [of the saints] like Junayd, Ghazālī, Shādhilī, Ḥātimī, and their like ؓ all said things that were rejected by those who had not reached their station, because only those who had reached their station could understand them and only those who were truly of them could accept them. Others, however, could only understand them from the viewpoint of *fiqh* and so heaped upon them ugly accusations of ignorance, deviation, idiocy, heresy, and disbelief. We take refuge in God from falling into that, and no one falls into that except someone whose inner vision is blinded and whose soul is dark, may God protect us.

---

[13] Daylāmī, *Musnad al-firdaws*, and considered as a good *ḥadīth* by Suyūṭī in *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaghīr*.

LETTER I

On maintaining the obligatory and the confirmed *sunna*

I WANT ANYONE who is attached to me to maintain the obligatory elements of the religion (*al-farā'iḍ*) along with the confirmed *sunna*. He [14] should also keep his body clean, and even more importantly, free of impurities, and this includes trimming pubic and underarm hair, fingernails and toenails, wearing ritually pure clothes, and sitting in a place that is also ritually pure. He should avoid what does not concern him,[15] and take care to rid himself completely of urine after urination, making sure its flow has stopped or that he is satisfied in his heart that it has. He should turn away from pursuing material things, and from his usual habits and desires, and not think that this is something impossible or surprising:

> The self is like an infant, if you neglect its proper care,
> It will grow up still loving to suckle;
> But once you wean it, it will be weaned[16]

... as the friend of God Most High, Sīdī al-Būṣīrī,[b] says in his *Burda*, and in the *Ḥikam* [197] of the great shaykh and saint Sīdī Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh: "He who finds it surprising that God can cause him to transcend his desires and bring him out of his heedlessness has underestimated the divine Power, *And God is capable of all things* [18:45]." This is why I consider it enough for a disciple to maintain what I have mentioned. God, the Infinitely Rich, will suffice him, while accomplishing a large number of devotional acts without what I have mentioned will not. So maintain the obligatory and the most important of the supererogatory, and God is the one who accords all success. *Peace!*

---

[14] The masculine pronoun is used only by linguistic convention. As is mentioned in later letters, the Shaykh had both male and female disciples.

[15] The *ḥadīth*, "Among the best ways a person can practice Islam is to avoid what does not concern him," is found in all the principal collections and is referred to repeatedly throughout these letters.

[16] Buṣīrī, *Burda*, line 18.The translation is from Aziza Spiker's edition, Guidance Media, U.K., 2012.

⁂

LETTER 2

Learning enough formal knowledge to accomplish the obligatory and confirmed *sunna*; the true meaning of Sufism

IF YOU WISH for your path to be shortened and to reach spiritual realization in the shortest possible time, then you should maintain the obligatory elements of the religion as well as the confirmed *sunna* and learn the formal (religious) knowledge needed to do this, for our Lord is not worshipped except by way of this knowledge. However, do not pursue it beyond that. It is not necessary for you to go deeply into that kind of knowledge, but rather to go deeply within and to oppose your passions. Then will you see wonders.

Noble character is the Sufism of the Sufis and the religion of the religious, and may God curse those who lie. Constantly flee from the sensory, [17] for it is the opposite of the spiritual and opposites do not meet. When you get stronger in the sensory domain, you get weaker in the spiritual domain, and when you get stronger in the spiritual, you get weaker in the sensory.

Listen to what happened to our Shaykh رضي الله عنه [18] at the beginning of his way, when he had threshed three bushels of wheat and had told his master, Sīdī al-ᶜArabī ibn ᶜAbdallāh[b] about that. "If you increase in the sensory," the latter responded, "you diminish in the spiritual, and if you diminish in the sensory, you increase in the spiritual."

This point is clear. There are people you can smell for a long time, and not get the faintest whiff of the spiritual—the only thing you smell is sweat! This is because the sensory world has taken them over completely and seized their hearts and limbs. It is the sole purpose of their lives, the only thing they chatter about, the only thing that preoccupies them. It is as if they are helpless to part with it, even though a great number of other people have, and have become immersed in the spiritual by virtue of having spent their lives detached from the sensory (may God be pleased with them and benefit us through their blessings. Amen, amen, amen!). As for worldly people, it is as if God Most High had not made for them any spiritual insights, even while each of them actually contains within himself as many of them as there are waves on the ocean. If they knew this, the sensory world would cease to draw them away from the spiritual. If they knew this, they would find within themselves shoreless seas—and God is a warrant for what I say.

---

[17] *Al-ḥiss*, the sensory, may be understood as the material world in general or sensual objects in particular. It is nearly always understood to be the opposite of *al-maᶜānī*, which literally means, "meanings," but in Sufi usage means "the intelligible or spiritual dimension of existence." The Shaykh also uses this latter term to express the notion of spiritual insights which come from God.

[18] That is, Shaykh al-Darqāwi's shaykh, Sīdī ᶜAlī al-Jamal.

⁂

LETTER 3

The true meaning of the invocation and encouragement towards it.

THE INVOCATION[19] IS the greatest pillar in the Way and its support, as you know, so maintain it as you have been told, and may God give you strength. We would also like you to remind people of God and of the *sunna* of the God's Messenger ﷺ, to warn them always against disbelief, to remind them always of humility, to encourage them to stay out of worldly affairs, and to enjoin upon them contentment with what they have, even as God has so enjoined.

Know (may God bless you) that the first benefit I received from my master ؓ was when he brought me two baskets full of mulberries to carry. I picked them up, intending to carry them with my hands and not on my shoulders as my companions were doing, and yet even so the task was so hard on my ego that it had reached the limits of contraction, agitation, and fright. I became so distressed that I was on the verge of weeping, and then, by God, I did: I wept at the humiliation and abasement that had befallen me. My ego simply could not accept it or anything like it and would never submit to it. [Up until that moment], I had not known about its pride, arrogance, and deceit. I had not known whether it was proud or not. No *faqīh*[20] had taught me anything about this in all I had studied, and I had studied with numerous people. Then, in the middle of my bewilderment and tribulation, there was the Shaykh, a person of unveilings and inner mysteries, who saw my pride, my confusion, and tribulation. He came over to me, took the baskets from my hands, placed them on my shoulders the way my companions, who were better than I in every way, were carrying them, and said, "This is the way to do it to get rid of some of that pride!" At that moment, a door opened up and I was guided aright. I knew who was proud from who was humble, who was fervent from who was joking, and who was knowledgeable from who was ignorant. I knew the *sunnī* from the innovator, the people of knowledge and practice from the people of knowledge without practice, so that after that I was no longer taken in by the *sunna* of a *sunnī*, nor by the innovation of an innovator, nor by the knowledge of the learned, nor the physical devotions of the devotee, nor the asceticism of the ascetic ... and so forth, because the Shaykh ؓ had taught me to know truth from falsehood, and fervor from jest—may God reward him with goodness on my account and protect him from evil.

---

[19] *Al-dhikr*, invocation, is used here and throughout to mean the invocation of a Divine Name or formula, either silently or aloud, singly or in a group, and involving both the tongue and the heart.

(Lastly), we would like Sīdī Aḥmad ibn ᶜAjība[b] to encourage God's servants towards sincerity in their words and deeds and also towards scrupulousness. By way of these, the servants' way is made much shorter, and by way of these, will they attain realization. *Peace!*

---

[20] *Faqīh*, plural *fuqahā'*, sometimes translated as "jurist," is used to mean a teacher of the kind of formal religious knowledge (*fiqh*) necessary to accomplish the formal acts of devotion—the ablution, Prayer, fasting, etc.—which make up the Five Pillars of the religion.

⁂

LETTER 4

Purifying servanthood from all else but God.

KNOW (may God be merciful to you) that when the *faqīr* exchanges the remembrance of all things for the remembrance of God, his servanthood will become totally for God, and whoever makes his servanthood totally for God is a saint.

So do not invoke any other than God, and do not belong to any other than God, for "Whoever belongs to God, God belongs to him,"[21] and blessed is the one who belongs to God and to whom God belongs. As for the excellence of the remembrance, it is enough to mention His Words, *So remember Me, and I shall remember you* [2:152], and the words of the Prophet ﷺ quoting his Lord ﷻ, "I am seated with the one who remembers Me."[22]

My master ؓ used to say to me, "I like what I hear said against you!" Al-ᶜArabī al-Darqāwī, too, likes what he hears said against you if it is something that slays your egos and gives life to your hearts, but not the opposite. No one would busy himself with what gave life to his ego and slew his heart except a heedless, ignorant person whose inner vision is sealed shut and whose soul is in darkness. A person has only one heart. When it turns in one direction, it turns away from the other, as God Most High says *God has not placed two hearts in the breast of any man* [33:4], and the great shaykh, Sīdī Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh,[b] ؓ said, "Your turning towards God (*al-Ḥaqq*) is your turning away from creatures (*al-khalq*), and your turning towards creatures is your turning away from God."[23]

One of our brothers said to me, "I am nothing." I said to him, "Do not say, 'I am nothing,' nor say, 'I am something;' do not say, 'I need something,' nor say, 'I need nothing.' Rather, say, '*Allāh*' and you will see marvels.

---

[21] This saying is considered by some to be a *ḥadīth*.

[22] *Ḥadīth* found in Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab al-Īmān*, Abū Nuᶜaym, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*, and other sources.

[23] We do not find this wording in the versions of the *Hikam* we are consulting.

Another of them asked me, "What is the cure for the ego?" and I answered him, "Forget it, and remember it no more, for only he who forgets his ego remembers his Lord."

Do not imagine, however, that it is the existence of the world which makes us forget our Lord. In fact, it is the existence of our egos which makes us forget Him, and what veils us from our Lord is that we do not journey past our egos. If we could forget the existence of our egos, we would find the One Who brings all into existence and we would lose our egos all together. Similarly, do not imagine that you could lose the existence of (the world) without also losing (the existence) of the ego. No, by God, that will never be.... *Peace!*

LETTER 5

Concerning the manners of begging, wearing the patched robe, and their true meaning; the Way of the folk ﵃

BEGGING AND WEARING the patched robe are both part of the Way of the folk ﵃, and yet I see a lot of our companions in this time do not remember God as much as they remember these two practices. There was one of them who took the litany from me and then went directly from that to donning the patched robe in order to start begging. Such was his true purpose, and the litany he received from us was only a pretext. When I saw him do this, I said, "Get rid of the patched robe! For you it is only a way to be known. Instead, invoke your Lord the way you are until your lamp is lit and your illumination grows strong. Then if you don the robe and the large rosary it will do you no harm."

Assuredly, begging and wearing the patched robe may be either heavy or light for the ego. If someone finds them light, then he should give them up, and if someone finds them heavy, then he should take them on. He should not go in any direction that is light for his ego, because sincerity rests in what is heavy for it, and sincerity is what we seek. Similarly, he should not go in a direction in which there is less sincerity. Rather, he should take the direction that is greater in sincerity, and continue in that way until the light and the heavy and praise and blame become one for him. Then will there be sincerity in every direction, and when that happens, he will be free, and by God, the one who is free is a saint.

I have looked into the case of someone who gave up all attachments except to begging, which is the weakest form of livelihood, and yet he did not taste what those who gave up all attachments tasted, and did not smell the perfume they smelled, and it occurred to me that it was because he was still residing with his ego's desires and what he gained from them. If he had freed himself from that, his illumination would have grown stronger, his lower nature would have grown weaker, and he would have tasted what the men of the Way have tasted (may God be pleased with them).

Junayd[b] wrote to one of his brothers: "To anyone who alludes to God and yet resides with another, God sends a trial by veiling His remembrance from the heart and directing it to the tongue [alone]. If he takes heed, cuts himself off from what he was residing with, and returns to what he was alluding to, then God will remove from him that trial and tribulation..." (and so forth, until the end of what he had to say ﵁).

Do not imagine that if the *faqīr* can cease to be with any created thing, he will not be in the Presence of God. That is impossible, for when his aspiration transcends creation, he arrives at the Creator, and by "arriving at the Creator," I mean arriving at the knowledge of Him.[24] So journey on with resolve past all with which you reside, whatever it may be. Do not reside with anything at all. "Those who settle for less than You have failed. Those who desire something in Your place have lost." [And.....] these are not the same.[25]

For anything you might part with there is a replacement
But there is no replacement if you part with God,
Say, "I seek Your Essence and nothing else,
Be it a manifested form or even a passing glimpse."

---

[24] Paraphrasing *Ḥikam* 196.

[25] From Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh, *K. al-Ḥikam, Munājāt 26.*

And as the saint Abū Madyan[b] said, "What a difference between the one whose aspiration is towards Houris and palaces and the one whose aspiration is to lift the veil and dwell in the Divine Presence!"[26]

Finally, beware of seeking fame, for there are extraordinary benefits to be had when we stop paying so much attention to ourselves inwardly and outwardly. Really, these days all I see are people who treat both these dimensions with the utmost loving care! *Peace!*

LETTER 6

On slaying the ego and occupying oneself with the Creator rather than the creation

KNOW THAT I was with my brother in God, the saint, and Ḥasanī *sharīf*, Abū'l-ᶜAbbās Sīdī Aḥmad al-Ṭāhirī (may God bless him) in the Qarawiyyin mosque and we were both in a deep state of contemplation. Then my companion's state was broken—or I could say, weakened—to the point that he fell into vain chatter like people do, so I said to him with severity and anger, "If you wish to profit, strike and cast it out!"

I also said to a brother who had told me that he had struck a Jew for no reason, simply out of pride and injustice, "Do not strike a Jew, or a Christian, or a Muslim—but strike your own ego and continue to so until it dies!" It is absolutely essential, dear brothers, that you do the same. Avoid vain chatter totally, for it is one of the greatest tribulations, and does not fit your station or your state. And speak only good of other people, for as the Prophet ﷺ said, "He who is not grateful to people is not grateful to God."[27]

I believe that whoever does not see people, that is, whoever has passed away from being conscious of them, does not contemplate God in a perfect way. Perfect contemplation is not veiled by creatures from the Creator, nor by the Creator from creatures, nor by separation from union, nor by union from separation, nor by effects from the Cause, nor by the Cause from effects, nor by the Law from the Truth,[28] nor by the Truth from the Law, nor by method from attraction, nor by attraction from method—and so forth. He who has this state has arrived, he is complete, he is a gnostic, and his opposite is someone who has lost his way, unless he be someone overwhelmed by the Divine Attraction (*al-majdhūb*)[29] and absent to his senses, in which case he has not lost his way at all. *Peace!*

---

[26] This is the 57th aphorism in Abū Madyan's short collection of aphorisms called *Uns al-waḥīd wa nuzhat al-murīd*, translated by Vincent Cornell in his book *The Way of Abū Madyan*, Islamic Text Society, Cambridge, 1996.

[27] Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, Ṭabarānī, *al-Awsaṭ* and others, with the wording, "Whoever does not give thanks to people does not give thanks to God."

LETTER 7

Letting God defend you

OCCUPY YOURSELVES WITH what God commands you to do and do not seek to defend yourselves against anyone who might insult or offend you, whether he be one of you or not. If you do not seek to defend yourselves, God Most High will defend you and take charge of your situation. If, on the other hand, you defend yourselves, and try to be in charge, He will leave it upon your shoulders—even while you have no power over anything, *and God—over all things—is powerful.*[30]

The great shaykh and saint, Sīdī Q̱āsim al-Khaṣāṣī ﵁,[b] said, "Do not concern yourself in the least with someone who seeks to harm you. Rather, occupy yourself with God and He will answer him for you, for in truth, He is the One who moved him against you to test your claims of sincerity." A lot of people err in this respect and get preoccupied with the insults of someone who attacks them, in which case the insult continues along with the sin [of being distracted from God], whereas if they returned to God, He would defend them and He would suffice them. *Peace!*

⁂

---

[28] "The Truth" with a capital T is used here and throughout to translate *al-Ḥaqīqa*, as used by the Sufis to mean "the Supreme Spiritual Truth, or Spiritual Reality, expressed in the formula, "There is no seer, hearer, speaker, or actor except God."

[29] *Jadhb*, attraction, refers to a relationship to the Divine Presence which is predominantly ecstatic and intoxicated.

[30] This phrase is repeated more than thirty times throughout the Q̱ur'ān.

LETTER 8

The life of the heart is in giving up the love of this world and in the death of the ego

PRACTICE WHAT SLAYS your egos and gives life to your hearts. The source of every virtue in itself is in emptying the heart of the love of this world, just as the source of every vice in itself is in filling it with this love. I wrote to one of our brothers after the words I have just mentioned: "The root of corruption is the love of the world. Anyone turned towards the world with his heart and limbs [becomes both] corrupt and tyrannical, and were it not for the fact that faith might still be in his heart, we might even consider him a disbeliever." So practice what slays your egos and gives life to your hearts, as we have said to you, for there is no reaching the Divine Presence except after the death of the ego, regardless of whatever else we might do. As the venerable shaykh and saint Sīdī Abū Madyan ﵁,[b] said, "He who does not die, does not see the Truth."[31]

One of our brothers complained to us about a tyrant who was bullying him. We said, "If you wish to slay your tyrant, then slay your ego, for in doing so you will slay all tyrants." And we said to another, "The greatest failure on your part is that the form of your ego shows itself to you and yet you do not tear down its house and erase its traces."[32] This is accomplished by always taking on what weighs heavily upon it, until it is slain, for in its slaying is the heart given life. As one of the masters wrote: "There is no life for the heart except in the death of the ego," or as another of them said, "Divine Love is a bride whose dowry is the ego. Hearts are not given life except by the egos' deaths..." and other such things.

I said to someone who had struck a Jew out of pride and injustice and then told me about it: "Do not strike a Jew, or a Christian, or anyone else. But if you must strike, then strike at your own ego and continue to so until you have slain it completely!"

---

[31] Cornell, *op. cit.,* aphorism 79.

[32] This is a Moroccan expression meaning "to get rid of some negative thing completely."

This is how we want our brothers to be, since every fault the *faqīr* may have arises from the life of the ego, while he whose ego dies is delivered from faults (*al-ᶜuyūb*), contemplates the mysteries of the unseen (*al-ghuyūb*), and becomes the master of all people in spite of themselves. This is what God gives him.

We again stress that you should always be clean, humble, and satisfied with what you have. And no one truly achieves this except the one who slays his ego and knows his Lord—otherwise, not: to be concentrated upon God unites one with God, and to be concentrated on other than God unites one with other than God, and we seek refuge from there being, besides God, what is other than God! "God was, and there was nothing else with Him, and he is now as He ever was."[33] *Peace!*

⁂

LETTER 9

Concerning *tajrīd* and dependence on God

GIVE PRAISE TO God Most High for the fact that you have turned towards Him in a time when the world has seized the hearts and limbs of nearly everyone. Know the great value of the state you are in, the state of withdrawal from the workaday world (*al-tajrīd*).[34] It contains great merit and an evident secret, and only someone whose inner vision God is extinguished and whose soul God has been kept in darkness would fail to know this. By God, were it not for the blessing of the Way, we would all be drowning in the sinful lives we had before. But we have been made well by virtue of it, for it is the form of obedience that God has ordained for us. God, be He praised, has delivered us by allowing us to know the people of God, for no one despairs (of God's mercy) who turns away from the workaday world, from wearing fine garments, and from socializing with friends and companions. Let our raiment be the raiment of the people of the Way ﷺ.

---

[33] *Ḥikam*, 34. This is sometimes quoted as a *ḥadīth*.

[34] *Al-tajrīd* literally means "stripping away." In the *Ṭarīqat al-Darqwiyya* at the time of Shaykh, it meant giving up working for a living, which is referred to as *asbāb*, literally, "intermediary causes." Someone following *tajrīd*, therefore, is someone who has "stripped away" intermediary causes. See also letters 56 and 57.

We have also said, "If you wish to be beautiful, rid yourself of passions."[35] Thanks to our renunciation of the world and our brothers' as well, a great many people in the west and the east have been reminded of God. They have abandoned the world and turned towards their Lord because of having seen our state, which is the state of the most excellent amongst us, may God grant us their love and contentment! Amen! So hold fast to this state, respect its requirements, and seek refuge in God! *And whosoever holds fast to God is indeed guided unto a straight path* [3:101]. Surely, the one whose refuge in God is never cut off from God's aid, and we could even say that God will replace him.[36] *Peace!*

⁂

LETTER 10

On not going to extremes in breaking norms

THERE IS NO way to God except through the door of the ego's death as understood by the folk رضي الله عنهم. We see—and God knows best—that the *faqīr* cannot slay his ego unless he perceives its form, and he does not perceive its form unless he separates himself from the workaday world, from companions and friends, and from his customary habits.

One of the *fuqarā'* said to me, "My wife has overcome me!" I replied, "It is not your wife who has overcome you, but rather your own ego. If you could overcome it, you would overcome all creation, not to mention your wife, for nothing really overcomes us except our egos, nor will we ever meet any worse aggressor. If we could slay it, we would slay all our oppressors—and may God curse those who lie!

I strongly advise my brother and all our brothers in that region رضي الله عنهم[37] not to go to the extremes we have heard about in breaking norms. They need to follow what slays their egos and revives their hearts. In fact, the way they have been breaking with conventions and speaking openly about esoteric truths alarms me, and I am fearful for them and for us, for God Most High has said, *So let those who contradict his command be wary, lest a trial befall them or a painful punishment befall them* [24:63]. I also fear that the luminous Truth they have been given will be transformed into a benighted one.[38] May God deliver them and us from error. *Peace!*

---

[35] The two verbs *taḥallā* and *takhallā* look identical except for the point over the letter *kha'*. A classical definition of Sufism is *al-takhliyya wa'l-taḥliyya* : "Being emptied (of sins and vice) and beautified (by virtue)."

[36] That is, God will take care of his worldly obligations.

[37] This letter is related to letter 149.

LETTER II

Caution against the deceptions of this lower world, and the people who love it, regardless of their knowledge and practice

HE WHO WANTS his journey to be shortened and to reach the state of the elect[39] that others have reached should only take on from this world what he can accomplish easily, without weariness and exhaustion. He should also beware of being duped by the knowledge or practice of a man who loves the world, whoever that might be. [In reality], that man is ignorant and devoid of knowledge, for knowledge belongs only to a knower who follows the *sunna*, which means someone who is averse to this lower world and who takes from it only a little, as our Prophet ﷺ did.[40] But someone whose heart is completely filled with the love of this world and whose limbs are usually busy acquiring it has neither knowledge nor practice, only ignorance: "God does not look at your forms or at your bodies. God looks at your hearts."[41] And as it is written in the Book of God Most High: *Truly it is not the eyes that go blind, but it is hearts within breasts that go blind* [22:46]. *Peace!*

---

[38] The notions of *al-ḥaqīqat al-nūrāniyya* and *al-ḥaqīqatu-l-ẓulmāniyya* are discussed in *Kitāb al-Ibrīz*, the teachings of ᶜAbd al-ᶜAzīz al-Dabbāgh (1132/1719-20) as compiled by his student Aḥmad ibn Mubārak al-Lamaṭī al-Sijilmāsī (d. 1156/1743), especially in Chapter 9.

[39] See footnote 3 above.

[40] Throughout these letters, the Shaykh uses the word *sunna* not only to refer to devotional and everyday practices based on the words and deeds of the Prophet ﷺ, but more specifically to the Prophet's relationship to the transitory aspect of the world, expressed in *ḥadīth* such as, "What have I got to do with this world? I am like a rider who stops for a time in the shade of a tree, then rides on and leaves it behind," (Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, Aḥmad, *Musnad*, Ḥākim, *Mustadrak*, and many other sources), and "Be in this world as if you were a stranger or a passerby." (Bukhārī, Ibn Majah, Tirmidhī, and others).

⁂

LETTER 12

The reality of the soul

THE SOUL IS something immense. It is the totality of the world because it is actually a copy of that world. Everything in the world is in the soul and everything in the soul is in the world. So he who masters his soul, assuredly masters the world around him, and he who is mastered by his soul is assuredly mastered by the world.

Listen to an example of the excellence, mystery, and blessings that comes to the one who has mastered his ego. [There was a time when] the date palms of Tafilalet [42] were not yielding. A group of men from that region had gone to the Ḥijāz—I think it was to perform the Pilgrimage— and when they were there, a great idea occurred to them. They said, "Our dates are not yielding and we have no other recourse than to take back with us someone from a family of *shurafā'* who will be a progenitor for us, our agriculture, and our land." So they agreed to go to a particular *sharīf* (may God be pleased with them all and endow us with their love) and ask him to grace them by one of his sons, and this they did. The *sharīf* (they went to) called for one of his sons to come before him and asked him, "How would you treat someone who treats you with goodness?"

The son answered, "I would treat him with goodness just as he treated me."

Then the father asked, "And how would you treat someone who treats you with malice?"

---

[41] The wording that the Shaykh quotes is found in Abū Nuᶜaym, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*. The more common version is in Muslim, Ibn Mājah, and others and reads: "Verily, God looks not at your forms nor at your possessions. He looks at your hearts and your deeds."

[42] An oasis in the Moroccan Sahara due south of Fes which is the homeland of the ᶜAlaoui dynasty which has ruled Morocco since the mid-1600s.

The son answered, "I would treat him with malice just as he treated me." So he let him go and called his brother, and what happened with the first happened with his brother. He called yet another brother, and his answer was the same as the other two, and he continued to question his many sons until he got to the youngest of them all. Again, he asked, "How would you treat someone treats you with goodness?"

The young son answered, "I would treat him with goodness in return."

Then the father asked, "And what about someone who treats you with malice?"

The boy said, "I would treat him with goodness in return."

The father pressed on, "How could that be? He treats you with malice you and you treat him with goodness in return?"

The boy answered, "Because in that case, he will remain with his malice and I will remain with my goodness until my goodness overcomes his malice." Upon hearing this, the *sharīf* gave them his young son to take back with them, and prayed that God's goodness come to him and to them.

In the way they approached their problem was an extraordinary lesson, and by way of that *sharīf*, God brought goodness both to the land and its people. They did what they did based on the love of the Prophet ﷺ and it was by this love that God brought goodness through that young *sharīf* who would return men's malice with goodness so that his goodness might overcome their malice. Such is the way of one who has mastered his soul, the way of nobility and virtue, and from his loins God brought forth many *shurafā'*, saints, scholars, and courageous ones who were like the Companions ﵇. Nobility, modesty, high aspiration, beautiful character, and humility—such was their nature and their way, and may God be pleased with them and grace us with their love. Amen! *Peace!*

LETTER 13

The necessity of a shaykh; the mystery of permission (*al-idhn*); the invocation of the Name

THE *FUQARĀʾ* OF early times ﵁ aspired for—or we can say, strove after—what slew their egos and gave life to their hearts, while nowadays we are the opposite. We aspire only for what slays our hearts and enlivens our egos. They aspired to abandon their passions and diminish the place of their egos, while we aspire only to gain the objects of our passions and to raise up the place of our egos. In so doing, we have turned our backs to the door and our faces to the wall.

I say this only because I have seen the gifts which God gives to those whose egos have died and whose hearts are alive. We have come to accept what is lower, but only an ignorant person is satisfied not to arrive.

I have asked myself whether there is anything else which keeps us from these gifts, and it occurs to me, by God, that another obstacle is our lack of personal inclination,[43] since insight generally comes only to those whose hearts are inclined towards [the spiritual] and who have a great connection to the vision of the Divine Essence. To such a person, spiritual insights arrive from the Divine Essence until he is effaced in them from the illusion of otherness. Such is how it affects the one who is connected to it. This differs from someone whose inclination is only towards acquiring formal knowledge, or only towards accomplishing acts of worship. To those kinds of people, spiritual insights do not come, nor would they be pleased with them if they did, for their aspiration is towards something other than the Lord Himself, and God Most High provides for servants to the measure of their aspirations, even while there is no doubt that each and every one of them has within himself as many spiritual insights as there are waves on the ocean. For most, however, the sensory domain has taken them over, seized their hearts and limbs, and does not let them go; it is the opposite of the spiritual domain, and opposites do not meet.

---

[43] *Qarīḥa* generally means an innate aptitude or talent, but the Shaykh uses it here in a sense that is close to "aspiration."

We believe that union with God comes about not through many deeds or few, but purely through the grace of God. As the saint, Ibn ʿAṭā'illāh[b] says in his *Ḥikam* [130]: "If you were to be united with Him only after the extinction of your vices and effacement of your pretensions, you would never be united with Him! Instead, when He wishes to unite you to Himself, He covers your attribute with His Attribute and hides your quality with His Quality. And thus He unites you to Himself by virtue of what comes from Him to you, not by virtue of what goes from you to Him."

Part of that grace, generosity, and excellence is that He [leads you to] a shaykh who can train you in the Way. Otherwise, no one would ever find such a teacher nor benefit from him, for "It is harder to know a saint than to know God," as Sīdī Abū'l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī[b] رضي الله عنه said, or as is stated in the *Ḥikam*, "Glory be to Him who has not made any sign leading to His saints save as a sign leading to Himself, and who has joined no one to them except him whom God wants to join to Himself." [156]

Without a doubt, the master of the inhabitants of the heavens and earth, the Messenger of God ﷺ, was present, manifest, and as clear as the sun over a mountaintop, and yet not everyone could see him. Some did, but some God veiled from him, just as others had been so veiled from the prophets and saints of their times that they called them liars and rejected them. As God's Book bears witness: *You see them looking upon you, but they see not.* [7:197], *And they say, "What ails this Messenger, who eats food and walks in the markets?"* [25:7] and other such verses. In fact, practically two-thirds or more of the Book speaks of how the Prophets (God's blessings and salutations of peace be upon them) were denied. When Abū Jahl,[b] for example, looked at the Prophet ﷺ, he saw only see the orphan raised by Abū Ṭālib.[b]

Thus it is with a shaykh who trains disciples in the Way, who is both perpetually ecstatic and perpetually methodic, perpetually intoxicated and perpetually sober, combining within himself the two states. Some people find such a teacher and others do not. If he is found, he might sometimes see that the way to liberate the spirit for the disciple lies in hunger and so he will ask him to fast in order to experience hunger.

At other times, he might see [the best way] lies in repletion, and so he will order him not to fast. Sometimes it will be for him to increase his involvement in the workaday world, and sometimes to reduce it. Sometimes it will be through sleep, sometimes through vigils, sometimes through fleeing from people, and sometimes through mingling with them, and so forth. For it may be that the disciple's illumination gets so strong that the master fears for his sanity, as has happened to many disciples of earlier times and later. So he will take him from a state of isolation from people to a state of mixing with them in order to weaken his illumination and preserve his sanity. On the other hand, if the disciple's illumination gets too weak, the master will return him to the state of isolation in order that it might be strengthened, and so forth—and *that the ultimate end is unto your Lord* [53:42].

Spiritual training, in fact, has become nearly impossible because of how few people find in their hearts the inclination to follow it, but God's Wisdom will never be cut off. We see that it is by God's strength and power that the Way is followed, since it was received by our masters ﵃, from the Messenger of God ﷺ, who received it from (the angel) Gabriel, who received it from God ﷻ. So anyone who comes to it does so by the permission of God and His Messenger ﷺ and all the teachers of the Way ﵃, just as Sīdī al-Mursī[b] said ﵁: "No master makes himself known to a disciple except after having received divine inspiration to so do and permission from God and His Messenger, may God bless him and his family and grant them peace." It is thus by the blessing and mystery of this permission that the Way is maintained and the states of those who follow it are made better—and God knows best.

In respect to what we have mentioned [earlier] concerning the heart's connection to the Divine Vision—this is not granted to any of us except after the ego is extinguished, effaced, left behind, vanished, removed, and eclipsed. As Sīdī Abū al-Mawāhib al-Tūnusī[b] said, "*Al-fanā'* is effacement, disappearance, leaving yourself behind, and ceasing to exist." Also, as the saint, Sīdī Abū Madyan ﵁,[b] said, "He who does not die does not see God." All the other masters of the Way ﵃ have said the same.

So beware of thinking that created things, be they subtle or gross, are what veil us from our Lord. By God, what veils us from Him is our illusion, and illusion by nature is something false. Sīdī Ibn ʿAṭā'illāh[b] says in his *Ḥikam*, "It is not the existence of something along with God that veils you from God, since there is nothing else beside Him. Rather, it is your illusion that there is something else beside Him that veils you." [137]

We see—and God knows better—that effacement will come about in the shortest time, God willing, by way of the invocation of the Supreme Name: *Allāh*. This is a method I found among the teachings of the esteemed master, Sīdī Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī,[b] mentioned in certain books belonging to one of the learned among our brothers of the Banī Zarwāl. It was also taught to me by my master, the noble teacher, Abū'l-Ḥasan, Sīdī ʿAlī ؓ[b] in an easier and more accessible form. This consists of visualizing the five letters of the Divine Name while repeating it—"*Allāh, Allāh, Allāh…*" [Following this practice], each time I lost sight of the letters, I would return to them, and if I lost sight of them a thousand times a night and a thousand times a day, I would return to them a thousand times a night and a thousand times a day. When I practiced this method at the beginning of my way for a little over a month, it produced within me a mighty thought. It had been bringing me many forms of knowledge and states of awe, but I had not allowed myself to become distracted by any of them. Rather, I continued to concentrate exclusively on the invocation of the Name and the visualization of its letters. But then, after a month, this state came to me with the words of God Most High, *He is the First, and the Last, and the Outward, and the Inward; and He is Knower of all things* [57:3]. I tried to pay no attention to these words, as I had been doing [with any other thought that came to me], and to concentrate solely on the invocation, but it would not let me. Indeed, it completely overwhelmed me and would not respond in the least to my attempts to resist it. Finally, when this thought would not leave me, I said to it, "As for His saying, *the First and the Last … and the Inward*, this I understand. But as for His saying *the Outward*, this I do not understand, since all I see outwardly is existing things." Then it said to me, "If the meaning of His words *the Outward* was other than what you see, then that would be inward, not outward. But I say to you, *He is the Outward,*" and at that moment I realized that there was nothing in existence except God and nothing in the cosmos other than Him, may thanks and praise be to God.

Effacement in the Divine Presence may be attained, God willing, by way of the method I have described in a short time, because it produces a contemplative state from morning until evening if it is accompanied by strong resolve. For me, it produced this state after a month or so—and God knows better. But surely, if someone can reach a contemplative state even after a year, or two, or three, that person has gained great goodness and an evident mystery, for a tradition states "An hour of reflection is more excellent than seventy years of physical devotions,"[44] because surely, such a state transports the servant from the world of turbidity to the world of clarity,[45] or we might say from the presence of creatures to the presence of the Creator. And God is a warrant for what we say.

We urge you who want to return from heedlessness to remembrance to attach your heart constantly to the vision of your Lord, and you will find support in the spiritual insights that will come to you, for such is its effect upon the one who is attached to it. But at the same time, we urge you not to prefer inspirations (*wāridāt*) to litanies (*awrād*),[46] for that will keep you from ever reaching the goal. *Peace!*

---

[44] The *ḥadīth,* "One hour of reflection is more excellent than sixty years of physical devotions," is narrated by Abū Shaykh in the Book of Greatness.

[45] "Clarity" (*al-ṣafā'*) and "turbidity" (*al-kadar*) are nouns originally applied to water or any liquid through which light can pass. Later in these letters, the Shaykh uses the same terms to refer to states of the soul.

[46] The most ancient meaning of the Arabic root WRD is to arrive with one's camels at a place where they can drink. Derived from this root is the word *al-wird,* litany, or any other regular, voluntary devotional practice, which brings the soul, as it were, to a place it can drink, and *al-wārid,* something which arrives, generally understood as inspiration. The *Ḥikam* [112] speaks of this interplay of the two words: "The litany is what He seeks from you, and inspiration is what you seek from Him; and what comparison is there between what He seeks from you and what you seek from Him?"

LETTER 14

Concerning the reason for repeating some of these teachings.

HEAR [THIS], O *faqīr*: I repeat some of these teachings so that someone who does not benefit from them the first time might benefit from hearing them a second time, or a third, or more. Also, it may be that whenever a *faqīr* with spiritual inclination looks at them, he will find what he needs without searching, [as in the vignette that follows]:

There was a *faqīh* from among our brothers from the Banī Zarwāl, may God deliver them from all error, who could always say things to make people laugh, even when they were burdened by cares and woes. One day we were at his house—there had been a funeral and the place was completely full of people, both the elect and the generality of folks—and people noticed that there were a lot of clubs set around the house—some were leaning against the wall, others were on the floor, and so forth. So they asked the *faqīh*, "Why so many clubs?" He answered, "These are so in case I spot a thief, I don't have to look around for a club! I just got a lot of them and put them in different places. If I ever see a thief in the house, I can easily grab one before I confront him!"

This was a good idea [on his part], and for [a similar reason] have I repeated certain teachings [throughout these letters]. *Peace!*

LETTER 15

All goodness is in the invocation of God; being occupied with it alone to the exclusion of all else; keeping a distance from the mundane world

THE ILLNESS THAT afflicts your heart, O *faqīr*, comes from the passions which run through you. If you were to be rid of them and to occupy yourself with what your Lord has commanded, this illness would cease to afflict you. Listen to what I say to you, and may God take you by the hand: if, whenever your ego starts gaining control of you, you hasten to fulfill what your Lord has commanded and give up your will to Him, those egoistic and demonic suggestions and every other tribulation as well will leave you. But if instead you start trying to work out and choose what to do, and sink into vain chatter, those egoistic and demonic suggestions will return to you with reinforcements, surround you and take you prisoner, and at that point, there will be nothing good left for you, only what is bad. May God conduct you and us along the way of His saints. Amen!

As the great shaykh and friend of God Most High, Sīdī Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh[b] says in his *Ḥikam*, "When you know that the devil will not neglect you, do not you yourself neglect the One in Whose hand is your forelock."[47] And our teacher ؓ said, "The real way to oppose the enemy is to be occupied with the love of the Friend.[48] If instead of that you occupy yourself with struggling against the enemy, he gains what he wants and you lose the love of the Friend."

We have said that all goodness lies in the remembrance of God and that the way to God is through the gate of being content with little of this world, staying distant from people, and paying scant attention to our appearance and our stomachs.[49] "Nothing benefits the heart more than a spiritual retreat wherein it enters the domain of meditation," as the great shaykh Sīdī Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh[b] ؓ says in his *Ḥikam* [12]. And we say that nothing benefits the heart more than to withdraw from this world and to sit in the presence of the saints ؓ.

As for the litany which we received from our master ؓ, we have already spoken of it, and for us and all the masters of the Way, to lower the place of the ego is a necessary condition,[50] even as one of them said, "The very thing you do not like about me is what my heart desires."

---

[47] *Ḥikam*, 236. The last expression paraphrases Q. 11:56: *There is no creature that crawls, but that He holds it by its forelock.*

[48] That is, the way to oppose the Devil is to be occupied with the love of God.

[49] That is to say, not to be excessively concerned about how we look or what we eat.

[50] The juxtaposition of mentioning the litany and lowering the ego seem to say that the Shaykh considers both of these essential conditions to following the Way.

But you should not say such a thing, O *faqīr*, until after you have said it to yourself and placed yourself upon its path and none other. *Peace!*

⁂

LETTER 16

The true meaning of the world and renunciation

THE ADVERSARY—be it the ego or the devil (may God curse them both)—has no power over us from any direction it might attack us as much as it does from the question of our earthly provision. And yet our Lord, Glory be to Him, has sworn to us by Himself: *So by the Lord of Heaven and earth, it is indeed true—as it is that you are endowed with speech.* [51:23], and also ... *Bid your family to prayer and be steadfast therein. We ask no provision of you; We provide for you. And the end belongs to reverence* [20:132]. Concerning this, there are many similar verses, numerous *ḥadīth* of the Messenger of God ﷺ, and many sayings of the saints, such as Sīdī Abū Yazīd al-Bastāmī رضي الله عنه[b] who said, "My duty is to worship Him as He commanded me to do and His duty is to provide for me as He promised He would." I mention this only because I am afraid that what has afflicted so many others might afflict you: I have seen so many people with abundant means, both religious and worldly, and yet who still fear poverty more than anything else. If they knew what wealth there is to be found in devoting themselves totally to God, they would give up their worldly attachments and concentrate on Him alone, that is, on fulfilling His commandments. But since they are ignorant of this, even after they have gathered up all their religious means and all their worldly means, their fear of poverty is not alleviated, nor is their fear of people. This is really extreme heedlessness and a bad state to be in, but it is the state of most people—nearly all of them!—and we seek refuge in God from that!

So beware of this, my brother. Put yourself totally in God's Hands, and you will see marvels, and do not put yourself in the hands of the world as so many people do lest there afflict you what has afflicted them. By God, if our hearts were truly with our Lord, the world would come to us inside our very houses, let alone outside, even as our Lord سبحانه وتعالى says, "O world! Serve those who serve Me and weary those who serve you!."[51] By God, if we truly belonged to our Lord, the cosmos and all that it contains would belong to us, just as it has to others, for God, be He glorified, created it to serve us just as He created us to serve Him. What is wrong with us, then, that we have traded our Guardian Lord for something of which we are its lords and guardians, and yet we feel no shame? And there is no strength nor power but through God!

Religious means [52] should be a concern in every age, and especially this age, since it is as if the religious without the worldly never existed, and yet it certainly did exist and continues to exist now. And God is a warrant for what we say.

We believe—and God knows better—that it is not possible for anyone to say to the decent folk of our time, "Cut down on your worldly activities, increase your spiritual practices, and God will replace you [in your worldly obligations] as He has replaced others!" Nothing is acceptable today except to say, "Plow! Earn! Trade!" and so forth. If you were to say, "Leave it! Renounce it! Follow the Way!" very few would listen to you even among the Sufis let alone the generality of the faithful of this age.

Yet, hear the words of the saint, Sīdī Abū'l-ᶜAbbās al-Mursī ﵁:[b] "People have their livelihoods, and our livelihood is faith and piety. God ﷿ says, *Had the people of the towns believed and been reverent, We would surely have opened unto them blessings from Heaven and earth.* [7:97]."[53]Shaykh al-Mursī also said, "People have their vocations, and our vocation is God." *Peace!*

---

[51] This is a *ḥadīth qudsī* reported by Ibn Masᶜūd and found in al-Khaṭīb, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, and Daylamī, *Ittiḥāf al-sunniya bi'l-aḥādīth al-qudsiyya*.

[52] By which he means worship.

[53] This is quoted from *Laṭā'if al-minan*, Dār al-Maᶜārif, Cairo, 1992 (Chapter 4, p. 111).

⁂

LETTER 17

The true nature of the world and encouragement to detach ourselves from it

THE WORLD IS everything that removes us from our Lord even though we are actually near Him, and this is the case for nearly everyone. I heard my Shaykh ﵁ say, "[The world] has entered into the knowledge of the scholars and into the poverty the *fuqarā'*, and has robbed them of the true meaning of what they have." The situation is indeed as he said ﵁, and if it has robbed the men, what about the women and children?

Hear what came to pass for me when I turned away from [the world] and towards my Lord. At that time, I would only need to look at someone wishing that he would return from heedlessness to remembrance and his state would change from what it had been to what I had wished. This was not by my choice or his, but by God's choice and His command. Then, I went back to [some worldly] involvement, and that station, which was comparable to the station of God's friend, Sīdī Abū Madyan al-Ghawth ﵁[b], was taken away from me and I went back to how I was in my days of heedlessness or even worse! *So take heed, O you who are possessed of sight.*[59:2] [This worldly venture] however, did not work out for me. Nothing of it succeeded, and that was by the blessing of my connection to one of the people of the Way ﵁.

I also saw two men, mature in years, who had been honored by union with God. Then the world offered itself to them and brought them both back to it, but God delivered them from it after it had seized them, and they fled from it and left it behind. That, too, was by the blessing of their connection to the people of the Way ﵁. But I also saw a man mature in years whom I knew well who was seized by the world and never returned from it. In fact, he died while still in its grips. [In his case], the one he considered to be his shaykh was dead, not living, and I do not know whether is possible or not to take a departed saint as shaykh. Certainly, I have seen a lot of people who claim to be affiliated with the great saint and gnostic, Mūlay ʿAbd al-Qā̱dir al-

Jilānī,[b] may God benefit us through him. They claim that he is their shaykh, even though they are alive and he is dead. In their case I believe that if such is their intention, then God Most High will be merciful to them because of their love for him and their affiliation with him. A pure intention can always bring about goodness for the one who has it, as a *ḥadīth* says, "A person's intention is better than his deeds,"[54] and in [the better-known] sound *ḥadīth*, "Deeds are according to their intentions, and to each person is what he intends."[55] But if [in following a shaykh of times past] their intention is other than what I have mentioned—if, for example, their intention is the same as someone's who would attach himself to a living, realized teacher so that he might unite them with their Lord, which is the task of those who are living and who themselves have been granted union, then only someone with no knowledge of the Way would imagine this to be possible. Indeed, if it were possible, then our guardian, the Messenger of God ﷺ, would suffice us over all others, for there is no one closer to people in their affairs than he.

Anyone who wants to learn a craft, regardless of what it is, needs a master, and in the craft of Sufism this is ever more so, which is why the Sufis, ؓ say, "Whoever has no shaykh, the Devil is his shaykh." And Ibn Shaybān ؓ[b] said, "Whoever has no master has no way. To remove intermediaries is disorder, while to attribute to them actions is a deviation,"[56] and similar such sayings. Someone who claims he has no need of a shaykh has turned his back to the door and his face to the wall. If we had remained upon the way brought to us by the Messenger of God ﷺ, had our hearts and limbs not come to oppose it, then, by God, what the Messenger of God ﷺ brought would suffice us from needing a shaykh. But when we ourselves have changed so much, when both our hearts and limbs have become callous, and turbidity has engulfed us, how can we not be in need of a master? Only a person who is proud, ignorant, or self-satisfied would ever say such a thing. *Peace!*

---

[54] Al-Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab al-īmān*.

[55] Bukhārī, Muslim, and all other principal sources.

[56] That is, a shaykh is necessary in order to follow the Way and those who claim we need no intermediaries do not understand that the entire universe works through intermediary causes. But to attribute to them the actions which bring results, this being God's prerogative, is nearly a form of disbelief. This notion is also echoed in words of the *Ṣalāt al-mashishiyya*, "Were it not for the intermediary," which in the context means the Prophet ﷺ, "the ones for whom he mediates would vanish."

LETTER 18

On the invocation of blessings upon the Messenger of God ﷺ in all situations and with the best comportment

SOMEONE WHO IS a sincere lover should not be negligent concerning the invocation of blessings upon the Prophet ﷺ, both in the obligatory and supererogatory prayers. Those are places of blessing, goodness, and excellence, and our Prophet ﷺ merits being remembered there and in every other honored place. Also, when [the servant] greets him with salutations of peace, he should to do with concentration (*yastaḥḍira al-salāma ᶜalayhi*), just as he should when he invokes blessings upon him. This is how he should always be, both in the places we have mentioned and at other venerable times as well. For I see that many people greet him with salutations (*yusallimūna ᶜalayhi*) in the same way that they invoke blessings upon him (*yuṣallūna ᶜalayhi*) and do not know that they are greeting him at the time they do so. They only know the invocation of blessings upon him. But someone who knows what he is doing is not like someone who does not know—there is a huge difference between them, even as God Most High says ... *Say, "Are those who know and those who do not know equal?* [39:9]... *or are darkness and light equal?"*[13:16] He should invoke God's blessings upon His Prophet, the best of his Lord's creation, with purity—his body, clothes, and the place he sits should all be pure, his stomach should be pure of unlawful food, and his tongue pure of lies. Then let him call to mind the noble form of the Prophet, may peace and blessings be upon him.[57]

---

[57] This echoes the instruction given by Imam al-Ghazālī in *Iḥyā ᶜulūm al-dīn*, The Book on the Mysteries of the Prayer, where he says, "When you sit for this (testimony) ... bring to mind the Prophet ﷺ and his noble person, and say, 'Peace be upon you, O Prophet, and the mercy of God and His blessings,' and be assured that your greeting will reach him and that he will return to you one that is even greater." One can add that when the worshipper in the Prayer utters the salutation, "Peace

LETTER 19

Antagonism towards the Sufis

ANTAGONISM TOWARDS THE *fuqarā'*, or towards any of God's servants, shows great ignorance and blindness. It is inevitable that novices [in the way] will make mistakes, and even the adepts—not to mention the novices—are not sinless. Sinlessness belongs only to the Prophets (God's blessings and salutations of peace be upon them). So if we see someone in error or committing a sin, let us remind him in a way that is kind and generous. If he accepts our reminder, then blessed be God! If not, then surely our Lord is the One Who knows best concerning us, and He has said: *O you who believe! You have charge of your own souls. He who is astray cannot harm you if you are rightly guided* [5:105]. *Peace*!

LETTER 20

Finding a reflective state in the recitation of the Qur'ān

THE PRAYER OF blessing upon the Prophet ﷺ you have continued to recite since the time you shaved your head[58] has all the merit that the Prophet ﷺ said [it has]. So if you wish to maintain it, then blessed be God, and if not, still our Prophet ﷺ has told us that there are sins that fall away from us when we invoke blessings upon him and by way of other practices as well, sins that are removed simply by our staying away from what does not concern us, and sins that are removed solely by God's grace. This is something we need to believe in and affirm.

As for your question about whether the Warsh[b] recitation is better for the purpose of reflecting [upon the meanings of the Qur'ān] or whether all recitations [are equally good], I believe—and God knows

---

be upon you, O Messenger of God….," his or her discourse at that moment is with the Prophet ﷺ, whereas when he or she invokes God's blessings upon the Prophet ﷺ using the words *Allāhumma ṣalli* either at the end of the Prayer or at other times, the discourse is with God.

[58] This may have been upon completing the Pilgrimage.

best—that such reflection can come about through any recitation provided the one who is reciting has turned away from this world, from people, and from everything that does not concern him. If not, then there is no recitation that is going to bring this about. So, my brother, turn away from the world, people, and whatever does not concern you and recite with any recitation you choose and the reflection and meanings which come to your heart from the Presence of the Beloved will not leave you, nor could you even *make* them leave you, for they will love you with the greatest of loves, and long for you with the greatest of longings, and yearn for you with the greatest of yearnings, and abound within you like waves upon the sea.

But the sensory world has taken control of you, me, and everyone else, and has seized our hearts and limbs. It is the opposite of the spiritual and two do not combine except in someone following the footsteps of the Messenger of God ﷺ, and such a person is very rare in any time—as rare as the red suphur—but in our time even more so. *Peace!*

LETTER 21

Choosing a shaykh

CONCERNING THE MAN you mentioned who is confused about who, among the people of this time, he should take as a shaykh: say to him that he should make a retreat in an empty mosque, or in the shrine of a great saint for a week or two or three. During that time, he should maintain physical purity, as well as the purity of his clothes and the place where he sits. He should keep his tongue clean of lies and his stomach clean of anything forbidden, and he should offer the Prayer, recite the Qur’ān, invoke blessings upon the Messenger of God ﷺ, or any other practice he can, but without over-doing any of it or exhausting himself. Then will God Most High show him what is true as true and what is false as false. And God is a warrant for what we say.

◆

LETTER 22

The ailment of the heart

IF YOU THINK deeply about the teachings I have addressed to you, you will find in them the remedy and goodness you seek. The ailment is what it is, and its remedy is what I have conveyed to you. If you do not make use of it after we had already given you something else, then what happens to you will be like what happened before. So hear what I have to say to you, abandon your ego, and do not be tempted by it, regardless of whether it is about something pertaining to this world or pertaining to the Next, so that your heart does not become harder.[59] What has befallen you has befallen you because your ego's passions have overcome you. If you were to abandon them, and occupy yourself with what your Lord commands, your heart would be cured.

◆

LETTER 23

Leaving work that causes tribulation

IF WE ARE doing some job that causes us tribulations in our religion, it is only right that we quit it. And if we have some work that does not cause us such tribulations, but there is another kind of work [open to us] that better supports us in keeping our religion, then it is better to quit the first and take the second. Otherwise, [there is] no need to change, and your situation is this latter case. So you have no need of my permission. Stay with your mosque and do not leave it,[60] and pray to God Most High for me that He will make both my life and my death in God's mosque. Pray for this and for all those you love. *Peace!*

---

[59] That is, neither activity for this world nor worship should concern reinforcing the ego.

[60] It appears that this letter was to one of his disciples who was an imam of a mosque, was considering some other work, and wanted the Shaykh's permission to change his job.

LETTER 24

On visiting the Shaykh and other issues

CONCERNING THE PREGNANT woman, we hope that God Most High will bestow upon her a male child and that he be named after the Prophet ﷺ. If the child is female, then I like the name Hāshimiyya. [61] Everything that comes from someone who is excellent is excellent, and the provision of everyone is from God.

And please do not burden yourself on my account. It is enough that you love me and I love you for the sake of God. Hear what I had to say to one of our brothers, may God be pleased with them: "Do not burden yourself for my sake if you do not find something to bring (when you visit me). If you can easily find something to bring, then may God be blessed! And if not, then just the fact that you are coming to visit me for the sake of God, and I am receiving you for the sake of God, so that from both sides, what we do is for purely for God, is in itself a great bounty and a great gift, and God knows best.

As for your wife's slackening in the recitation of our litany, her Lord knows best her situation. Encourage her with kindness and generosity, and may God Most High strengthen her in it, for He is the Infinitely Generous One and immense in favor and grace.

Also, concerning the teacher you mentioned to me who does not find presence: tell him to stop looking towards the past or towards the future and become a child of his moment, with death before his eyes, and he will find that presence, God willing.

I have said to some of our brothers رضي الله عنهم, "He who wishes for on-going presence should keep his tongue from [excessive] talk." I also urge that you do not try to relieve your state of bewilderment either through writing or other means. In doing that, you would be locking the door of pressing need with your own hands, for bewilderment and loss are both forms of pressing need, and need can take the place of invoking the Supreme Name—and God knows better.

---

[61] Hāshim was the great grandfather of the Prophet ﷺ after whom the Hāshimī clan was named. The original meaning of the name *hāshim* in Arabic is "someone who breaks bread," referring to generosity in feeding people.

The *Ḥikam* of Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh[b] states: “The feast days of the aspirants are when states of need arise,”[174] and “States of need are gift-laden carpets,”[176] and also “You may find benefits in states of need that you do not find in fasting and prayer.” [175] So if [this state] comes over you, avoid trying to help yourself by seeking shelter in any means whatsoever so that the goodness that comes to you is not taken away. Rather submit yourself to God's will and you will see marvels! Or as our master ؓ would say to a person in a state of bewilderment, “Relax and learn to swim.”

LETTER 25

Not words, but states

OUR MASTER, ؓ would not judge the *fuqarā'* by their words but rather by their states. He would say, “An inch of practice is better than a hundred yards of knowledge!”[62] And the situation is as he said: I see so very many tongues, but almost no hearts. But God's blessings are truly endless.

The gnostic and master of our masters, the saint Abū ᶜAbdallāh Sīdī Muḥammad ibn ᶜAbdallāh al-Fāsī ؓ,[b] would often say by way of counsel, “Eat what is pure, stop mixing with people, and avoid those pretending to be *fuqarā'* these days, because they are mostly dominated by their passions and it is rare to find a sincere person among them.” Often, when people would visit him for the sake of getting spiritual counsel, he would say to them only this and caution them against getting involved in things which may be lawful in themselves but which may lead to what is forbidden.

---

[62] That is, formal exoteric knowledge.

LETTER 26

To someone confused about his situation

AS FOR THE brother who is confused concerning his situation, tell him to offer the obligatory prayers and the confirmed *sunna* and then, following them, to recite: *God suffices us, an excellent Guardian is He!* [3:173] three times, "There is no strength nor power but through God the Sublime and All-Mighty," three times, *God will suffice you against them, and He is the Hearing, the Knowing* [2:137] three times, "*Our Lord! Grant us mercy from Your Presence, and make us incline to sound judgment concerning our affair*" [18:10] three times, and "O God shower blessings upon our master Muḥammad, the unlettered Prophet, and upon his family and companions, and send them salutations of peace," three times, in the morning and in the evening, and he will see marvels.[63] He should maintain this practice whether he is travelling or at home, and if he does as I suggest, his resolve will become so strong, God willing, that it will be impossible to resist. I once told a certain brother to follow this practice and he did, and there came to him great goodness and a clear inner secret, and God is a warrant for what I say. In fact, we would like both the one who is travelling and the one staying home to keep this practice their whole lives.

Also, dear brother, do not despise the fact that your ego exists within you. If it were not for that ego, the traveler's journey would never happen. One of the *fuqahā'* from among our brothers from the Banī Zarwāl once said to me, "My desires have afflicted me!" I said to him, "As for me, they are what has served me, profited me, made me grow, and strengthened me. I have nothing except God's gifts, and the gift of my desires, and the gift of our respected masters of the Way, may God be pleased with them." And if you ask me, "O *faqīr*, how can this be?" I would answer, "Because it is in abandoning the ego that someone profits, and it is by clinging to it that one fails." As the great master and gnostic Tāj al-Dīn Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh ؓ[b] said in his *Ḥikam*: "He only made affliction come to you by way of people so that you would not find repose among them and so as to drive you away from all things so that nothing else would distract you from Him." [235] And the great master and saint, Sīdī ibn al-Bannā' ؓ[b] says in *Mubāḥith*:[64]

---

[63] *Ḥasbuna-l-Lāhu wa niᶜma-l-wakīl;*
Wa lā ḥawla wa lā quwwata illā bi-l-Lāhi-l-ᶜaliyyi-l-ᶜāẓīm;
Fa sayakfīkahum Allāh wa Huwa-s-Samīᶜu-l-ᶜAlīm;
Rabbanā ātinā mi(n)-l-ludunka raḥmata(w)-wa hayyi' lanā min amrinā rashada;
Allāhumma ṣalli ᶜalā sayyidnā Muḥammadin wa ᶜalā ālihi wa ṣaḥbihi wa sallim.

> He who permits his ego all that it desires
> Makes his passions into his lord...

and other such sayings.

LETTER 27

The results of sincerity with God

THERE IS NOTHING more useful to you, O *faqīr*, than being sincere with your Lord in respect to what He has commanded you to do and prohibited you from doing. By God, if you are like this with Him, you will see marvels, for He has said, *Were they true to God, it would be better for them* [47:21]. By God, if we acted with sincerity towards Him, our foes would join us in that sincerity along with those we cannot even imagine. By God, if we restrained ourselves from causing harm to any of our Lord's servants, He would restrain them from harming us and we would see from them only goodness, not evil. Those who had harmed us and those who had fled from us would neither harm us nor flee from us again. But this will not happen until after the death of our egos, after their erasure, annihilation, departure, and extinction.

---

[64] *Al-Mubāḥith al-Aṣliyya* is a comprehensive exposition of the Sufi path in approximately 460 rhyming couplets, known today principally through the commentary entitled *al-Futūḥāt al-Ilāhiyya*, composed by Sīdī Aḥmad ibn ᶜAjība.

LETTER 28

Keeping a distance from people

SAFETY, O *faqīr*, rests in your fleeing from people whose state does not inspire you and whose speech does not lead you to God Most High,[65] for such people are ignorant of the *sunna*[66] of our Prophet ﷺ and ignorant of their own ignorance—and we seek refuge in God from that! Their ignorance has grown and become so great that whenever they see someone who abases his own ego, belittles it, makes it lowly, scorns it, and does not attach to it any importance, someone who has also turned away from the world and its denizens, they belittle him, scorn him, find him unbearable, stay away from him, and despise him. They do not see him as someone following the *sunna*; rather, they see him as someone following innovation (*bidᶜa*). They do not know that what he is following ﷺ is the essence of the Muhammadan *sunna*, and what they are following is innovation. And the reason for their state is that the sensory world has taken control of them; it has seized their hearts and limbs, and left them *Deaf, dumb, and blind,* [so] *they do not understand* [2:171]. How amazing that the true meanings of things have gotten so reversed that *sunna* has become innovation, and innovation *sunna*, and that a blind man describes the path to someone who is looking at it with his own two eyes! "*Truly we are God's, and unto Him we return.*" [2:156] and there is no strength nor power but through God, the Sublime and All-Mighty! *Peace!*

---

[65] He is paraphrasing *Ḥikam* 43, "Do not keep company with anyone whose state does not inspire you and who speech does not lead you to God."

[66] See footnote 40.

⁂

LETTER 29

Do not foster all that your heart conceives

O FAQĪR, do not attribute purity to yourself[67] until you can do so with complete honesty, and do not foster everything that is born of your heart. It is better to cast it away than to be distracted from your Lord by trying to foster it.[This is what] so many people do, until they lose the way, take the wrong path, and vanish in a mirage. If they understood, they would say, "Hearts are amazing! In a single instant, they can give birth to countless children, some of whom are legitimate, some of whom are not, and some of whom it is impossible to tell!" How can anyone devote himself to God if he is completely taken up by fostering all that his heart conceives? What a pity it is that the child of Adam used to be able to efface the world so that not a trace of it remained, while now the world effaces him so that not a trace of him remains except for a faint odor that lasts an instant and then vanishes. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 30

The signs of loving God

IF YOU LOVE your Guardian Lord, O *faqīr*, then give up your ego and your world and everyone whose state does not inspire you and whose speech does not direct you to God, and beware of letting yourself be deluded by anyone. For how many a one you see calling to God who is really calling to his own passions! The great saint, Sīdī Abū al-Shitā' al-Khammār,[b] may God benefit us through him, used to say, "By God, I do not say 'my master' (*Sīdī*) or 'son of my master' to anyone except the one who frees me from my bonds." And it should not be hidden from you, O *faqīr*, that what imprisons a person in this world—this world of turbidity and shadows—and leaves him there as a prisoner is illusion. If that illusion were to be removed from him, he would be transported to the world of purity from which he came, and God is the One Who returns every stranger to his homeland. *Peace!*

---

[67] He is paraphrasing Q. 53:32 ...*He knows you best when He brings you forth from the earth and when you are embryos in the wombs of your mothers; therefore do not attribute purity to your souls; He knows him best who guards (against evil).*

LETTER 31

Things are hidden in their opposites

SURELY, THINGS ARE hidden in their opposites: finding in losing, giving in deprivation, honor in lowliness, wealth in poverty, strength in weakness, vastness in narrowness, elevation in depth, life in death, victory in humility, power in weakness ... and so forth. So if someone wishes to find, let him be content to lose; if he wishes to be given, let him be content with being deprived; if he wishes honor, let him be content with lowliness; if he wishes wealth, let him be content with neediness; if he wishes to be strong, let him be content with weakness; if he wishes expanse, let him be content with narrowness; if he wishes elevation, let him be content with debasement; if he wishes for life, let him be content with death; if he wishes for victory, let him be content with defeat; if he wishes for strength, let him be content with weakness—in a word, if he wishes to be free, let him be content with servanthood, just as our beloved master and Prophet ﷺ was content with it. Let him chose it as did our Prophet ﷺ and let him not wax proud nor be overbearing, nor seek to exceed what he essentially is—for the servant is the servant and the Lord is the Lord. The great master Tāj al-Dīn Sīdī ibn ᶜAṭā’illāh[b] says in his precious Book of Wisdom (*al-Ḥikam*)[126], “He has prohibited you from claiming for yourself, among the qualities of created beings, that which does not belong to you; so would He permit you to lay claim to His Attributes Who is the Lord of the worlds?” And they have said—by which I mean the Sufis—“This path of ours only works for those who sweep the rubbish heaps with their spirits.”[68] *Peace!*

---

[68] This saying is sometimes attributed to Sahl al-Tustarī, “speaks of their extreme humility.

LETTER 32

If we abandoned the world...

BY GOD, IF we abandoned this world, it would come to us, seek us, and find us, just as we have sought it and not found it. It would run after us and catch up with us just as we have after it and caught up with it. It would weep for us and we would console it just as we have wept for it and were not consoled. It would love us passionately and be fulfilled through us just as we have loved it passionately and not fulfilled our needs through it ... and so forth. And God is a warrant for what we say.

It has been said that this world comes, in spite of itself, to the one who has truly renounced it, and that if a prayer cap fell from the sky, it would land on the head of the one who does not want it. *Peace!*

LETTER 33

The bride of incomparable beauty

O FAQĪR, the state of the elect[69] is one of virtue, beauty, proportion, and equilibrium. It is like a bride of incomparable beauty whom none shall have, whose goodness, beauty, and fair gifts none shall enjoy, except someone who has abandoned his desires, who has replaced repletion with hunger, talk with silence, sleep with vigil, honor with humility, exaltedness with lowliness, wealth with poverty, strength with weakness, and power with powerlessness—or we might say, except by a person who has replaced his faults with virtues. He it is who will enjoy her goodness, her beauty, and fairness; he it is who will see his Lord, be He glorified, and his Prophet ﷺ; he it is who lives in the world and attains its (true) benefits. This is a (true) person; this is a human being; this is a person of knowledge; this is a *sunnī*; this is a gnostic; this is a Sufi; this is a man; this is the one who outwits the tricks of time but whom time does not outwit.

---

[69] See footnote 3 above.

As for one whose heart is full of vices, such a one will not enjoy the state of the elect, nor should he hope for the vision of his Lord, be He glorified, nor of his Prophet ﷺ. If someone loves God and His Messenger ﷺ, let him purify his heart of his vices as we have said, and God willing he shall have what he wants. *Peace!*

LETTER 34

Strength

THE STRONG MAN is he who is happy to see the world slip from his hands, leave him, and flee. He is happy if people blame and insult him, for his satisfaction rests in his knowledge of God. As the great master, Sīdī Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh ؓ[b] says in his *Ḥikam*: "When it pains you that people do not come to you, or that they do so only with rebukes, then return to the knowledge of God in you. But if the knowledge of Him in you does not satisfy you, then your affliction at *not* being content with that knowledge is greater that your affliction at the pain coming from people." [234] And "He only made affliction come at the hands of people so that you would not repose in them. He wants to drive you out of everything so that nothing would divert you from Him." [235]

LETTER 35

The Shādhiliyya Path

IF OUR MASTER left you upon the pure Shādhiliyya path that he followed ؓ, you yourselves have made some mistake and today you are following something else.[70] And if he did not leave you upon that path, still—by God— you are following something else.

If you ask me to explain how this can be, I would say that his path ؓ went down towards what is below and did not rise up toward what is above, while the path you are on is the opposite. His path was one of being outwardly lowly and inwardly exalted, while yours is the opposite. You can also say that his path ﵁ was outward rigor and inward beauty, while yours is outward beauty and inward rigor, just like the way of the generality of people—and we seek refuge in God from (claiming) that the path of the elect is like the path of the generality.

---

[70] This letter appears to have been written to the disciples of Sīdī ᶜAlī Jamal in Fes after his death.

In addition, it is not of concern for people of spiritual tastes to be involved with books, while books are all that occupy you, and the shaykh, too, should be one, while for you there are many.

This is what I have seen of your state, and it seems to me that your ship will not set sail (in such a state), not even move from its spot, unless you descend towards what is lowly, and not ascend towards what is high, give up your involvement with books, and follow a single master. Otherwise, your ship will not make it to safety. On the contrary, it is bound to sink. *Peace!*

LETTER 36

Turning to God

I URGE YOU to be constant in following the Muhammadan *sunna*, to remember your Lord in hardship and ease, and to invoke blessings upon your Prophet ﷺ. If you follow what I am saying to you, you will be truly God's devoted servants, and whoever is truly God's servant, not the servant of his own desires, is one of God's saints.

Beware as much as you can of anything that distracts you from your Lord, for in reality, there is nothing except God. "God was, and there was nothing beside Him, and He is now as He ever was."[71] When a person thinks he needs something [else], it is due to his ignorance and lack of understanding. Were it not for that, he would need nothing except God, and both the mighty Qur'ān and the prophetic *ḥadīth* affirm this. Hear too what God's saint, Sahl al-Tustarī ﵁,[b] told a disciple who said to him, "O master, [we need] food!" The shaykh answered, "Allāh!" The disciple was silent for a moment, and then said, "We must have food!" And [Sahl] answered, "We must have Allāh."

---

[71] This saying is quoted in *Ḥikam* 37. The first clause, with the wording, "God was, and there was nothing other than Him," is a *ḥadīth* in the collection of Bukhārī, and in Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab al-Īmān*.

In reality, neither we nor anyone else is in need of anything other than God, and if we belonged to Him, He would belong to us as He has to others who belonged to Him.

I also urge you to stay in contact with one another always, and remind one another concerning the Way all your lives, as those have done before you. Beware, and again, beware of being in a hurry for the spiritual awakening to take place, as some people are, for to do so is to miss the beauty of the Way, its goodness, its mystery, its blessing, and its grace. Anyone who wants to harvest the fruit before it is ripe will end up being denied it.

Make every effort to stay in contact with one another, respect one another, honor one another, and crown all this with modesty: *Fulfill the pact of God when you have pledged it* [16:91]. Love one another and be kind to one another as the Prophet ﷺ said, and beware of treating each other foolishly, betraying each other, cheating one another, or leaving the Way... and God is the One Who grants accord.

Know that it is important to act with mindfulness and care, and nothing more merits our care than God's favor to us. The [true] man does not weaken, grow lazy, or slack. Rather, he strives against his ego by imposing upon it what it is averse to and what weighs heavily upon it until it passes away in *fanā'* which, as Sīdī Abū al-Mawāhib al-Tūnusī ؓ[b] said in his *Qawānīn*,[72] means "Effacement, disappearance, leaving yourself behind, and ceasing to be."

◆

LETTER 37

The true meaning of invocation

IF THE BELIEVER can reach such inner peace through the invocation (*dhikr*) of his Lord that even the great terror of Judgment Day will not grieve him, then how could he be disturbed by the trials and tribulations of this world? So hold fast, dear brother, and be constant in the invocation of your Lord, as we have said to you, and you will see marvels—

---

[72] By which he means *Qawānīn ḥikam al-ishrāq*.

and may God grant you and us His accord. For us, "invocation," does not mean that someone is always saying "*Allāh, Allāh,*" and praying and fasting, but then when he is struck by some affliction, he looks for what deeds he might have in his hands and finds nothing. Rather, invocation for the people of realization رضي الله عنهم means that the invoker keeps the commandments, the most important of which is that he stay out of what does not concern him. Then if his Lord makes Himself known to him—or we could also say, reveals Himself to him—through either His Names of Majesty or His Names of Beauty, he will know him and not be ignorant of Him. This is the true invocation of the invokers, and not that a man be constantly worshipping, but then when his Lord reveals Himself in a way contrary to his desires, is ignorant of Him and does not know Him. May God help you and us to understand this. Amen!

Be patient with [the decrees of] your Lord. Hold fast to patience, and He will cover your weakness with His strength, your lowliness with His honor, your poverty with His wealth, your impotence with His power, your ignorance with His knowledge, your anger with His clemency, and so forth, and you will be revived with eternal life in this world before the Next. This eternal life should not be something unknown to you, for God Most High has said concerning those to whom it is given, *And We shall remove whatever rancor lies within their breasts—"as brothers, upon couches, facing one another." No weariness shall befall them therein; nor shall they be expelled therefrom.* [15:47-48]. *Peace!*

LETTER 38

Constancy in asking God's blessings upon the Prophet ﷺ

IF YOU WISH to reach your goal, then invoke blessings upon the noble Prophet ﷺ even if only a hundred times in a day and night, for a small amount of practice done with constancy is better than a great amount done intermittently.[73] But no practice is small unless the one doing it is not following the Muhammadan *sunna*.[74] If he is, then all his practice can only be great. Without a doubt, if someone is following the *sunna*, then he does not fail to bless the one from whom it came ﷺ, even if he does not do so with his tongue, and if he also invokes blessings upon him with his tongue, then it is light upon light. Surely the one who truly follows the *sunna* invokes blessings upon him ﷺ with his entire being, while the one who is engrossed [in worldly work] and pays no attention to the *sunna* invokes blessings upon him only with his tongue, not with his other faculties. A little practice done with the *sunna* is better than much practice done with innovation. So understand, and may God allow you and us to understand. Hold fast to these blessed teachings, and may God enrich you by way of them. Amen! *Peace!*

---

[73] Echoing the *ḥadīth* in Bukhārī and Muslim, "The most beloved practice to God is that which is regular, even if little."

LETTER 39

Avoiding involvement with people

O *FAQĪR*! No one is safe from [harmful] people except an intelligent and clever person, especially in this, our time. Beware of them always, and beware of their malice, even if they greet you. And if one of them does greet you, and you know he is doing so in order to engage you in [talk] and so that you fall into his hands, return his greeting—because that is a religious obligation—[75] but then continue on your way. If he then goes his way and leaves you alone, blessed be God! And otherwise, ask him if he has a dirham or two to give you for the sake of God, and it will be like touching him on a sore spot. He will leave you howling, and you will have repelled him. But without a doubt, it is hard to avoid such people, and without a doubt, it is God's way in creation to give people like that some power over His saints at the beginning of their path, *and you will find no alteration in the wont of God* [33:62, 35:43, 48:23].

In *Laṭā'if al-minan*, the illustrious master and saint, Sīdī ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh ؒ[b] says, "Know that when God's saints first embark on the Sufi path, God empowers other people power over them in order to purge them of what remains of their… vices and weaknesses, and in order for their virtues to be brought to perfection. He also deals with them in this manner lest they rely on other human beings. Someone who does you harm frees you from slavery to his kindness, whereas someone who shows you kindness enslaves you by putting you in his debt…The Messenger of God ﷺ said, 'If someone does you a favor, reward him, and if you are unable to do that, then call down blessings upon him.'" [76]

---

[74] See footnote 40.

[75] He is referring to the Qur'anic injunction, *When you are greeted with a greeting, greet with a better one or return it*...[4:86].

The purpose behind all this is thus to free the servant's heart from other people's benevolence, so that he can attach it [solely] to the true Sovereign.

Shaykh Abū'l-Ḥasan (al-Shādhilī) ؓ[b] said, 'Flee from people's kindness more than you flee from the evil they commit against you. For their kindness affects you in your heart, whereas their evil affects you only in your body. To be affected in your body is better than to be affected in your heart, and an enemy through whom you draw near to God is better than a friend who alienates you from Him. Consider their friendly approach toward you by night and their shunning of you by day. Do you not see that when they approach you thus, they are bringing tribulation?"[77] He also said, "God's manner of dealing with His sincere friends and loved ones as they first embark on the Sufi path is to give other human beings power over them."[78]

And you will not see (such people) as critical towards any of the people of the Way ؓ as they are towards the people of *tajrīd*[79] and those who beg. True, the way of *tajrīd* is the direct opposite of the way of living in the workaday world, but both are lawful and someone who reviles *tajrīd* is reviling the way of complete trust in God's providence, God Most High says, *And whosoever trusts in God, He suffices him. Truly God fulfills His Command* [65:3]. Sīdī Ibn al-Bannā' ؓ[b] has said in *Mubāḥith,*

---

[76] *Ḥadīth* in the *Sunan* of Abū Dāwūd and Nasāᶜī, in Ibn Ḥanbal's *Musnad*, and other sources.

[77] *Laṭā'if al-minan, op. cit.* (chapter 4, pp. 116-117). The translation is from Nancy Roberts, *The Subtle Blessings in the Saintly Lives of Abu al-Abbas al-Mursi & His Master Abu al-Hasan*, Fons Vitae, Kentucky, 2005, p. 173.

[78] *Laṭā'if al-minan, op. cit.* p. 117, with the translation from Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

[79] See footnote 34.

> To be occupied not with earning but with worship
> is pure reliance on God as the masters have said.

... and other similar things.

Also, to revile someone who has a means of living in the world is to revile the *sunna*, and begging is a legally permissible means, based on the words of God Most High to His Prophet ﷺ *And the one who asks for alms, repel not.* [93:10], and also based on the words of the Prophet ﷺ, "Give to the one who asks of you even if he comes on horseback."[80]

The liar bears his lie, as God Most High says,[81] and whoever changes or alters this, his reckoning is with God. *Peace!*

LETTER 40

Good deeds done in private and public

O *FAQĪR*! it has been narrated that a good act done in secret is better than one done in public by seventy degrees. But we believe—and God knows best—that the circle of invocation done by our brothers the *fuqarā'*, aloud, standing and seated, in the zāwiya, in homes, in isolated places or inhabited ones, replaces practice done in secret. This is because the time we live in is one of great heedlessness. It has completely overwhelmed people, taken hold of their hearts and limbs, and left them *Deaf, dumb, and blind, they do not understand* [2:171]. Also, in doing deeds openly there is mutual support, and so to make them known is better than doing them in secret, especially in what concerns the circle of invocation, about which the Prophet ﷺ said, "When you pass through the meadows of Paradise, graze!" And when they asked him, "O Messenger of God, what are the meadows of Paradise?" He answered, "The circles of invocation."[82] He also said ﷺ, "No folk gather together for the invocation of God Most High, seeking only His

---

[80] *Ḥadīth* found in Mālik, *al-Muwaṭṭa'*, and Suyuṭī, *Jāmiᶜ al-ṣaghīr*, al-Mutaqqī al-Hindi, *Kanz al-ᶜummāl*, and other sources.

[81] Referring to Q. 40:28, *If he is a liar, then his lying is to his own detriment*

[82] In Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, Tirmidhī, Sunan, Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab al-Īmān*, and numerous other sources.

Countenance, except that a caller calls to them from the heavens, 'Arise forgiven! I have exchanged your ill deeds for good ones'." [83] And there are many other similar narrations.

I have said this to my brother in God, the scholar and true Sufi, the *sharīf*, Abū'l-ᶜAbbās Sīdī Aḥmad ibn ᶜAjība al-Manjarī, [b] and he found it correct and nothing in it of which he disapproved, may God be pleased with him. *Peace!*

⁂

LETTER 41

Concerning the one who says he has never tasted anything from his practice

HE WHO WOULD know how many days of his life he has squandered should always devote a time to his Lord, free of any selfish goals, and on the condition that his body, clothes, and place are pure of defilement, his tongue is clean of lies, and his stomach is clean of unlawful food. Then, by God, if his action is for his Lord and not for any selfish purpose, as we have said, he will come to know what we are saying and journey with his heart away from all the desires of his ego to his Lord. And beware and again beware of being deluded by someone who says, "I have had many moments with my Lord, but I am still me, and I have not seen anything. I have not journeyed from my passions, nor from my many involvements!" There are many people who say things like this and as God is my witness, they include even someone whom we consider a good person, someone we believe has blessing and a spiritual secret, who is considered among people to be one of the elect, not the generality, a great man, great *faqīh*, great ascetic, someone who is over eighty years old—but with all that, when he saw some of our brothers ﵃ and how their spiritual state had changed in such a short time, and how spiritual attraction and ecstasy had come to them, he said, "What have they done that such spiritual attraction and ecstasy should come to them? I have visited the shrine of the illustrious master, Mūlay ᶜAbd al-Salām ibn Mashīsh, [b] may God benefit us through him, more than twenty times concerning the efficacy of a talisman I have to ease my provision, and it has not worked for me in the least. All the years of my life I have been poking around in the dark and nothing has appeared to me like what has appeared to them."

---

[83] *Ibid.* Also in al-Mutaqqī al-Hindi, *Kanz al-ᶜummāl.*

This kind of person is common these days—and there is no strength nor power but through God! But the matter is not as they suppose it to be. If they had been practicing what they practiced truly for their Lord and not for some egoistic purpose, and if they had truly been following the *sunna* of their Prophet ﷺ, their hearts would have journeyed from this world and the Next, and would not have stopped journeying nor been content to do so until they had arrived in the presence of their Lord. The one who follows the *sunna* never loses hope, is never at fault, and never far from goodness. Such is our doctrine, and we will follow it until we meet our Lord.

Also beware and again beware of letting illusions block your way as they have for so many others among your contemporaries and those who are older than you and greater in knowledge. You must absolutely beware of illusions. They are false, and whoever gets stranded by his illusions will be deprived of great good—even if he is a shaykh, let alone if he is someone so dominated by his ego that it dictates to him, and he writes down what it dictates and never sees beyond it nor opposes it—and we take refuge from God from that. *Peace!*

LETTER 42

Getting rid of illusions

O *FAQĪR*! Illusions, as you know, are devoid of reality, but if pay them enough attention, they can [still] prevent you from journeying to your Lord and leave you self-absorbed and wandering far from your Lord—and we seek refuge in God from that! If, however you do not pay attention to them, their evil will depart from you and their goodness will come to you. It is in opposing the point of view [they show you], and the point of view of the ego or of the devil, may God curse him, that the journey of the travelers is realized and every moment of their time becomes sweet and joyful. *Peace!*

LETTER 43

The sign of one devoted to God

THERE IS A great sign by which to know someone who has devoted himself to God. It is that all matters great and small are obedient to him and subservient to his order and prohibition. He becomes, in respect to creation, like the heart in respect to the body. If the heart is moved, so are the limbs of the body, and if it is at rest, so are they. If it rises, they rise, and if it sits, they sit. If it is contracted, they are contracted, and if it is expanded, they expand. If it weakens, they weaken, and if it grows strong, they grow strong. If it is humble, they are humble, if it is proud, they are proud … and so forth.

So, too, it is with the one who is devoted to his Lord, effaced in the vision of his Lord's grandeur from the illusion of anything else. For such a one, all existence is subservient to him and responds to his command and his prohibition. Wheresoever he turns, it turns. And God is a warrant for what we say. *Peace!*

LETTER 44

Both the spirit and the ego are fashioned from the Prophet's Light

THE SPIRIT IS luminous in nature and comes from the essence of light. Assuredly, God Most High took a Handful of His Light and said to it: *Be Muḥammad*, and it was. Then from his light ﷺ all things were fashioned. So understand.

The soul and the ego (*al-nafs*) are one and the same. The turbidity of the ego is only because it is attached to the world of turbidity. If it journeys forth and becomes distant from the world, it returns to the homeland from whence it came, which is the Divine Presence. Thus, the great master and saint, Sīdī ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān al-Majdhūb ؓ,[b] said:

From whence did you come,
O spirit enraptured by love,

Motionless in the unfolding glory,
Divine in all your states?

LETTER 45

Rigor and beauty

IF YOU WERE to say, "Our master, Sīdī ᶜAlī ﵁, was broad and you are narrow," I would say that he was both broad and narrow, lenient and strict, strong and weak, rich and poor. He was a shoreless ocean and his knowledge was sweeter than sugar and more bitter than colocynth. For he was constantly repeating these words from the great saint Sīdī Abū al-Mawāhib al-Tūnusī ﵁[b]: "If someone claims that you can contemplate the Divine Beauty before having been disciplined by the Divine Rigor, reject him, for he is a *dajjāl*."[84]

LETTER 46

The Robes of reverent fear

SOMEONE WHO IS totally sincere towards God may wear whatever clothes he wants, be they fine or lowly, because he is indifferent to whether he is viewed as being high or low. Someone who has not reached that level of sincerity, however, should dress only the way ordinary people do.

Give up what is forbidden and disapproved of, O *faqīr*, and marry whomsoever you wish, ride whatever mount you wish, earn what you wish, live where you wish, and be as you wish, and if anyone should blame you with proofs, O you who are sincere for God, then I will answer them in your place:

A person who has not donned the robes of reverent fear
Goes forth naked even if fully dressed.
The best of garments to wear is obedience to the Lord.
There is no good in the one who sins against Him.

---

[84] "The beast," roughly equivalent to the anti-Christ in Christianity.

If the world were meant to last for its dwellers,
Then God's Messenger would be with us here today,
But it is passing away with its delights and comforts,
Even while sins and transgressions remain.[85]

LETTER 47

Putting ourselves in God's Hands

LISTEN, O *faqīr*: I was once so bewildered by a certain matter for so long that it had worn me out completely. Then it occurred to me that what I needed most in that state was to turn to my Lord with total need, and it was then that I found in His Book these words: *Unto God belongs the affair, before and after,* [30:4], *Unto God belongs the affair altogether* [13:31], *And unto Him are all matters returned* [11:123]. So I surrendered to Him [all my cares about] the matter in question, I placed my soul in His Hands, and ceased to bear it, knowing it was already being borne, even as the master of our Master, Abū ᶜAbd Allāh Sīdī Muḥammad ibn Saᶜīd al-Fahrī al-Ṭarābulsī ؓ[b] said: "Leave the house to its Builder. If He so wills, He will keep it standing and if He so wills, He will let it crumble." And also as the saint, Sīdī al-Ḥaḍramī ؓ said:

Surrender to Salma and go where she goes
Follow the winds of destiny and turn where they turn.

Then I found rest and peace, and my time became joyful and sweet. May praise and thanks be to God! The secret is in letting go of the ego—but as for actually slaying it, that is next to impossible. *Peace!*

LETTER 48

Know God and all creation will know you

WHEN THE SERVANT comes to know his Lord, all creatures will come to know him and all things will obey him, and God knows best.

---

[85] Lines attributed to the famed Abbasid court poet, Abū al-ᶜAtāhiyya (d. 828 CE).

Know that the renowned shaykh, our master [Sīdī ʿAlī] ﵁,[b] said, "When you become inwardly empty of creatures, you will become inwardly filled by the Creator and love will be engendered between you and all other beings. Whenever your dealings with the Creator are pure, all creatures will incline towards you with love. *Peace!*"

And we have said (may God be content with us!) that when you are sincere in contemplating your Lord, knowledge of Him will flood your being and come to you in all His Attributes. If you know Him in all these modes and do not fail to do so in any of them, existence and all that it contains will know you, love you, respect you, honor you, promise itself to you, obey you, long for you, delight in your mention, be interested in you, and take pride in you, boast of you and you will witness all this with your very eyes.

But if you fail to know God when He makes Himself known to you, all things will fail to know you as well. They will belittle you, humiliate you, abase you, scorn you, find you repulsive and unbearable, stay far from you, insult you, ignore you, flee from you, confront you, and defeat you.

So, O *faqīr*, if you want to truly benefit, be firm in your contemplation of your Lord from the moment you come to know Him. Then He will replace your ignorance with knowledge, your weakness with strength, your impotence with ability, your poverty with wealth, your lowliness with honor, your loss with gain, your estrangement with intimacy, and your distance with proximity. We might also say God, be He glorified, will cover your attribute with His and your quality with His, for He is the Infinitely Generous and the Possessor of Immense Grace. Glorified be He and exalted! *Peace!*

LETTER 49

Do not defend yourselves

O *FAQĪR*! if you have surrendered your affair to your Lord and emptied yourself of your own will [in the matter], when someone insults you, be careful not to defend yourself against them and thus become enslaved by it, for to do this only helps the one who insults you towards in his purpose. [And if you do not defend yourself], then a secret which had never occurred to you before will occur to you, and you will see it with your own eyes and hear it with your own ears. And God is a warrant for what we say. *Peace!*

LETTER 50

On seeing the Prophet ﷺ in the waking state

BY GOD, DEAR brothers, I would never have supposed that anyone of the learned (may God be pleased with them) would deny the possibility of seeing the Prophet ﷺ in the waking state until I met some of them in the Qarawiyyin Mosque one day and spoke to them concerning it. They said, "How could this be possible when the Prophet ﷺ has been dead for over twelve hundred years? His words ﷺ, 'Whoever has seen me,' that is, while asleep, 'has truly seen me, for the devil cannot imitate me' refer only to seeing him in a dream."[86]

So I said to them, "Certainly, no one sees him in the waking state except the one who has been transported by spiritual insight—or I could say by meditations—from [this] world to the world of spirits (*ᶜālam al-arwāḥ*), and there he will see him without a doubt and see all those who are beloved to him." When I said to them that he could be seen in the world of spirits, they stopped talking and fell silent, but after a little while, they asked: "Tell us how this can be." I said, "Can you yourselves tell me where the world of spirits is in respect to the world of physical forms?" But they did not know what to answer. So I continued: "Wherever the physical world is, there too is the world of spirits; wherever the world of turbidity is, there too is the world of clarity; wherever the kingdom (*al-mulk*) is, there too are the celestial domains (*al-malakūt*); wherever the lower worlds are, there too are the sublime worlds, and there too are all the worlds."

---

[86] This is one version of a *ḥadīth* found in the collections of Bukhārī, *Taᶜbīr*, and Muslim, *Ru'yā*, as well as many other main sources. Another version in Bukhārī ends with, "The dream of a believer is one forty-sixth of prophecy," while in Muslim the wording is, "Whosever has seen me in a dream will see me in the waking state," or "...it is as if he has seen me while awake, for the devil cannot imitate me."

In fact, it has been said that there are eighteen thousand worlds like our own world—this is mentioned in *Ḥilyat al-awliyā*[87]—and all of these are contained within a human being, but he is unaware of them unless God takes him as a friend, and covers his attributes by His Attributes, and his quality by His Quality.[88] He has—be He glorified—taken as His friends many of His servants, and will continue to do so until the end of their lives. The illustrious master and saint, Sīdī ibn al-Bannā',[b] says in *al-Mubāḥith*,

> Know that you are a copy of existence
> By God, how sublime is your being!
> Are not the Footstool and the Throne within you,
> The lower realms and those on high?
> The cosmos is but a man of vast proportion
> And you, a microcosm that reflects it.[89]

And the illustrious master and saint, Sīdī al-Mursī ؓ,[b] said,

> You who are bewildered about the mystery of your soul,
> Look within yourself—you will find the cosmos.
> You are complete, both as Way and inner truth,
> O synthesis of the entire divine mystery!

To see the Prophet ﷺ [in the waking state] is not at all remote for someone who is following his *sunna* and has brought his own character into conformity with the Prophet's virtues. Such a person will not be disappointed, nor fail, nor will goodness ever be far from him: this is our belief and we will follow it until the meeting with our Lord. This goodness is only out of reach for someone who has turned away from the *sunna* and accepted reprehensible innovation instead, who has traded virtue for vice, who is so immersed in his own desires that he can no longer distinguish between good actions and bad ones. But anyone who leaves that and takes the best of paths is never far from goodness. How could he be, when he is following what his Lord has commanded him to follow? By God, by God, by God— there is no doubt that the people of the spirit رضي الله عنه are those who crave for a vision of the Prophet ﷺ. They have broken the habits of their own egos and severed their attachments [to worldliness], and because of this, spiritual insights come to them. As for the people of the sensory world, they do not crave this vision nor do they have any real hopes of attaining it, for hope is something that must be matched with action. Otherwise, it is only wishful thinking. And how, indeed, can they crave for this vision when it is the exact opposite of the sensory [world], and opposites do not meet? Whenever the sensory is strengthened, the spiritual weakens, and whenever the spiritual is strengthened, the sensory weakens. [The sensory world], in fact, has taken such complete control over people that they do not occupy themselves with anything else, nor chat about anything else, nor involve themselves in anything else (and we take refuge in God from that), such that only a very few can give it up ... For someone who is in this situation, from where can spiritual insights come to him? They only come to the one who has left [the world] and whose ego has given up [grasping for it]. If he does this, spiritual insights will come to him as they have to many others, and if he does not stop [with these insights alone],[90] they will continue to transport him from world to world until he is brought into the two Noble Presences: the Divine Presence and the Prophetic Presence.

---

[87] In Abū Nuᶜaym's *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*, 2:180, under the entry for Rafīᶜ Abū al-ᶜĀliyya, it is related, "He said concerning the words of God Most High, *To God belongs all praise, Lord of the heavens and Lord of the earth, and Lord of the worlds* [45:36], 'The jinn are a world and human beings are a world, and besides those are eighteen thousand worlds of angels upon the earth ...." Ibn Kathīr, al-Qurṭūbī, Ibn Abī Ḥatim, and others quote this same saying in their commentary on *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*. In some cases, the source is mentioned as being Wahb ibn Munnabih.

[88] Here he is paraphrasing *Ḥikam* 130 quoted in Letter 13.

[89] In commenting on these lines from part four of *Mubāḥith*, Ibn ᶜAjība says, "Historians say that God created the whole of existence in a human form ... and that this is an indication of the nobility (of that form) in the cosmos."

---

[90] The notion of "stopping," that is, being content with the "flashes" of insight and visions which come at the beginning of the Way, is elucidated in *Ḥikam* 20: "Hardly does the intention of the initiate want to stop at what has been revealed to him, than the voices of Reality call out to him: 'That which you are looking for is still ahead of you!' And hardly do the exterior aspects of created beings display their charms, that their inner realities call out to him: *We are only a trial, so disbelieve not!* [2:102]."

There is also no doubt that the vision we have mentioned is not granted to anyone except after he has become free of the faults and obscurities which are still within him.

How amazing that you should deny [the possibility of] the vision of the Prophet ﷺ and see it as something unlikely and strange when so many of the saints ؓ have seen him in the waking state as clearly as the sun. But as God's friend, Sīdī al-Buṣīrī[b] said:

> ... The eye may reject the sun's light when it is inflamed
> And when the body is unwell,
> The mouth may shun even the taste of sweet water. [91]

Someone who wants to know whether the Prophet ﷺ may be seen in the waking state or in dreams need only look at the books of the folk, may God be pleased with them, such as the illustrious Imam Abū Nuʿaym al-Aṣbahānī,[b] Imam al-Suyūṭī,[b] and others and he will find there [records] of the saints' visions of the Prophet ﷺ both in the waking state and in dreams, [as clearly] as the sun. There he will also find mentioned visions of other prophets and angels, may peace be upon them. [For example], the great spiritual master and saint, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, said in his treatise, *Tanwīr al-ḥalak fī imkāni ru'yati al-nabiyyi wa'l-malak* (Casting light into the darkness concerning the possibility of seeing the Prophet and angel):[92]

> Shaykh ʿAbd al-Ghaffār ibn Nūḥ al-Qūṣī[b] said in his book *al-Waḥīd* "Among the companions of shaykh Abū Yaḥyā was Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Aswānī from Akhmīm[b] and about whom it was reported that he saw the Prophet ﷺ all the time, and there was hardly a time when he did not." [ʿAbd al-Ghaffār] also said in *al-Waḥīd* that Shaykh Abū'l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī[b] had such a connection with the Prophet ﷺ that when he greeted him (*sallama*),[93] the Prophet ﷺ would return his greeting and would answer him when he conversed with him.

---

[91] *The Burda*, *op. cit.*, line 104.

[92] The work referred to above, *Tanwīr al-ḥalak*, is an undated treatise. It was published in an annotated edition of about 100 pages by Dar al-Ameen, Cairo, 1992.

[93] For example, with the words *as-salāmu 'alayka ayyuha-n-nabiyyu,* which are uttered while sitting in the canonic prayer.

> Shaykh Tāj al-Dīn Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh[b] says in *Laṭā'if al-Minan*, "A man said to Sīdī Abū'l-ᶜAbbās al-Mursī, 'Please shake my hand with yours, for you have encountered [pious] men and the greatest of saints [*al-abdāl*].[94]' To this the shaykh replied, "By God, no one has shaken this hand except the Messenger of God ﷺ." He [also] said, "By God, if the Messenger of God were veiled from me for the wink of an eye, I would not reckon myself among the Muslims."
>
> Both shaykhs Ṣafī al-Dīn ibn al-Manṣūr[b] in his *Treatise* (*al-Risāla*) and ᶜAbd al-Ghaffār in *al-Waḥīd* related that shaykh Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Zarqānī said, "Shaykh Abū'l-ᶜAbbās al-Ṭanjī[b] said, "I came to Sīdī Aḥmad al-Rifāᶜī[b] and he said to me, 'I am not your shaykh. Your shaykh is ᶜAbd al-Raḥīm in Qinā. Go there!' So I journeyed to Qinā and went to shaykh ᶜAbd al-Raḥīm [al-Qinā'ī].[b] He said to me, 'Do you personally know the Messenger of God ﷺ?' I said I did not. He said, 'Then go to Jerusalem.' [This I did] and the moment I set my foot in the Sanctuary, the sky, the earth, the Throne, and the Footstool were filled by the Messenger of God ﷺ. Then I returned to the shaykh and he asked me, 'Do you personally know the Messenger of God ﷺ?' and I said that I did. Then he said, 'Now your path is complete: no saint is a saint—whether *aqṭab*, or *awtād*, or a friend of God—except by personal knowledge of the Prophet ﷺ.'"[95]

All this is in *Tanwīr al-ḥalak fī imkān ru'yati al-Nabiyyi wa'l-malak*, and other examples which would be enough for anyone, and in other books of the folk are mentioned similar marvelous and strange things.

My Lord, be He glorified, honored me at the beginning of my path when I was a young man in the city of Fes, may God protect it from harm, in the year 1182 AH[96] such that I ceased to see anything in my own self, or in anyone else, or in anything else except God Most High, but the moment I saw God Most High, I saw the Prophet ﷺ or the moment I saw the Prophet ﷺ, I saw God Most High. And in my vision I was perpetually intoxicated, perpetually sober, and sometimes so powerfully intoxicated or powerfully sober that my skin seemed about to burst and my soul to be erased, then my Lord gave to me a strength that I had never known and never heard of and never had been told of by anyone. This was that God Most High placed strength in my weakness, warmth in my coldness, honor in my lowliness, wealth in my poverty, ability in my impotence, breadth in my narrowness, expansion in my contraction, victory in my defeat, ecstasy in my loss, exaltation in my abasement, connection in my severance, nearness in my distance, love in my aversion, repair in my ruin, profit in my loss, stature in my humiliation, and so forth, so that my feet became firmly planted in the Way and I could live in that difficult time without a traveling companion, by which I mean a shaykh, for without a doubt, there was little beauty to that time and much ugliness.

---

[94] In *Laṭā'if al-minan* and in the version quoted in *Kitāb al-waḥīd*, the words in this narrative are *bilādan wa ᶜibādan* (lands and people).

[95] This version of the story is found in *Kitāb al-Waḥīd* (cf. note 51) which was completed in 708/1308. A more sober version is recounted in *al-Risāla* (f. 91 b of Gril's edition), completed in 679/1280, in which Shaykh al-Ṭanjī is quoted as saying, "When I entered [the Dome of] the Rock in Jerusalem, a knowledge of the Prophet ﷺ came to me by inspiration, and I knew this was the knowledge spoken of by Shaykh ᶜAbd al-Raḥīm, for it was like nothing I had ever known before."

Know, dear brothers—may God teach you goodness and protect you from evil—that the people of sincerity do not do things lightly. Whenever they move—or we might say, whenever they stumble—concerning anything, the news of comes from all corners of the land and reaches both bondsman and freeman, the great and the small. And even though the matter may have been hidden from everyone, everyone speaks of it, thus fulfilling the words of the Messenger of God ﷺ, "He who hides a secret within him God will be clothed in its garment."[97] So understand, dear brothers, and take note of what is happening in this moment, for I see that great goodness and a clear and evident secret are coming to pass. And God is a warrant for what I say.

---

[96] 1768 CE.

[97] Ṭabarānī, *al-Awsaṭ* and *al-Kabīr*. Sīdī Ibn ʿAjība also quotes this in his commentary on the 28th aphorism of the *Kitāb al-Ḥikam*: "Whatever is deposited in the invisible world of innermost hearts is manifested in the visible world of phenomena." The general meaning of this saying is that whatever is truly in a person's heart, be it light or darkness, will show in his or her external limbs. The saying quoted as a *ḥadith* above means that the spiritual unveilings in the heart will appear outwardly both in virtue and goodness as well as in what people might intuit concerning a person even if they do not, themselves, understand what those mysteries are.

LETTER 51

The best advice

THE BEST ADVICE I can pass on to you, O *faqīr*, is to maintain the obligatory worship as well as what is confirmed of the *sunna* and to be careful about removing any urine that remains after urination as the rules of purification require. You should also maintain your state of cleanliness, and humility, be satisfied with what you have, offer the Prayer of seeking God's choice (*al-istikhāra*) as related by the Prophet ﷺ,[98] recite the Qur'ān, visit [sacred sites], keep to silence, maintain the ablution, offer the morning Prayer (*al-ḍuḥā*) and the Prayer of greeting upon entering the mosque,[99] and the invocation of blessings upon the Prophet ﷺ. Avoid lying, back-biting, gossip, and both what is forbidden and what is disapproved. By God, if you keep to this and are as careful as you can be in doing so, your lights will dawn and show forth, your secrets will cease to be hidden, and the true nature of your being will always be illuminated and never benighted.[100] *Peace!*

---

[98] In letter 234 the Shaykh describes the method of offering this Prayer in detail.

[99] The morning Prayer here refers to *ṣalāt al-ḍuḥā*, a Prayer of two to eight bowings offered in pairs when the sun has completely cleared the horizon. The Prayer of greeting upon entering the mosque (*taḥiyyat al-masjid*) is of two bowings.

[100] Briefly put, *al-ḥaqīqatu al-ẓulmāniyya* may be understood to mean spiritual insights or understandings which lead the one who receives them into disbelief or heresy by relativizing, in that person's mind, the importance of the religious form. In modern times, this might be the case of those who try to follow an esoteric way without following the religion of which it is a part. See chapter nine of *Kitāb al-Ibrīz* by ᶜAbd al-ᶜAzīz al-Debbāgh (d. 1156/1743), translated by John O'Kane and Bernd Radtke, pages 841-647, and Sīdī Aḥmad ibn ᶜAjība's explanation in his commentary on the *Ṣalāt al-Mashishiyya*, included in *Two Sufi Commentaries*, Fons Vitae, Kentucky, 2015, p. 158.

⁂

LETTER 52

On the spirit and the self

THE SPIRIT (*al-rūḥ*) and the self (*al-nafs*) are one and the same luminous entity that comes from the very essence of light. What differentiates one from the other are only two qualities: clarity (*al-ṣafā*), which is its original state, and turbidity (*al-kadar*), which is its contingent possibility.[101] And if you ask, O *faqīr*, how that can be, I would say that as long as the spirit remains in its [innate] purity, goodness, splendor, beauty, honor, sublimity, and exaltedness, no other name can be applied to it than "spirit". But if it departs from [that state] and takes on the turbidity of having left its homeland and come to dwell among other than its beloved friends, then the name "self" is applied to it. At its lower stages, it is called "the self which commands," "the self which blames," and other such names,[102] and at its higher stages it is called by [other names]. Indeed, these names are countless, just as it has been said, "The self has as many flaws as God has perfections."

So, my brother, if you wish to ascend to the true homeland from whence you came—and that is the world of purity—and to leave this land of strangers—this world of turbidity, then do it! And if you ask me how, I would say remove it much as you would skin a sheep. Forget it and do not remember it in the least. Then will your illumination be strengthened, God willing, which is to say that spiritual insight will return to you with its forces, those forces which are great, powerful, and strong, and you will be borne quickly back to your homeland. But try it, for it is by experience that we come to know essential truths.

---

[101] See footnote 45. In a figurative sense, they are used to refer to a heart that is pure as opposed to one that is darkened by sin, or to a state of the soul that is calm and serene as opposed to one that is in turmoil.

When he says that the original state is clarity, he is expressing the basic Muslim perspective derived from the Qur'anic verse, *We created man in the most beautiful form then sent him down to the lowest of the low* [95:4] as well as the *ḥadīth*, "Every child is born endowed with primordial perfection (*al-fiṭra*)...."

[102] "The soul which commands towards evil" (*al-nafs al ammāratun bi al-sū'*) is mentioned in Q.12:53, and "The soul which blames" (*al-naf al-lawwāma*) in Q.75:2. Throughout this translation, we have used the term "ego" to refer to the lowest modes of the self.

As for the spirit [itself], there is no doubt that none knows its essential truth except God, for it possesses countless mysteries, even as God Most High revealed to His Messenger ﷺ when the Jews had asked him concerning what it is. He had not known how to respond—indeed he could not know—and they had said [amongst themselves before asking], "If he answers us, he is not a prophet, but if he cannot answer, he is." In fact, he did not answer them until God caused him ﷺ to know what to say to them.[103]

This inability (to answer) is itself one of the qualities of servanthood,[104] a state which is an honor from God. Thus did He praise of His Prophet when He said in His Book, *Glory be to Him Who carried His servant by night* [17:1] and not, "His Prophet," or "His Messenger," or any other term. He chose for him the name "servant," for in servanthood lies true nobility.

It has also been said that the self possesses a secret that was not manifested to any of God's creatures except Pharaoh, upon which he said, *"I am your lord most high"* [79:24][105] *Peace!*

---

[103] This refers to 17:85, *And they ask you concerning the soul. Say: the soul is by the command of my Lord and of knowledge you have been given but little.*

[104] The servant of God (*ᶜabd Allāh*) by definition is someone with limitations both in ability and knowledge which in turn are aspects of humility.

[105] The verse following this goes on, *So God seized him with a punishment exemplary in the Hereafter and in this world* [79:25]. The allusion about the Pharaoh cited by the Shaykh al-Darqāwī is mentioned as early as in the commentary by Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) on verse 7:176. Nearly a thousand years later, the shaykh's student, Sīdī Ibn ᶜAjība, in his own Qur'anic commentary, explained that the secret or mystery of the soul stems from the fact that "all souls emerge from the world of power and majesty, that is, from the *Jabarūt*, and as soon as they descend to the formal world and are given the burden of servitude and humility before the irresistible power of God, they experience distress and suffering, are repulsed by lowliness and humility, and seek to cling to their origin. It is thus that God has brought forth messengers and spiritual teachers to show them that it is actually in that state of servanthood that they will find their happiness and salvation." *Al-Baḥr al-Madīd*, vol. 4, p. 253.

LETTER 53

The sensory dimension *(al-ḥissī)*

THE SENSORY WORLD[106] has overwhelmed people. Despite their scholars, righteous ones, and leaders, it has seized their hearts and limbs and left them *deaf, dumb, and blind,*[107] such that for most people, it is all they chatter about, all they busy themselves with, indeed, all they know, and very few of them escape [it]. It is as if God Most High had not made for them any spiritual insights at all, while in reality, He has made for each of them as many as there are waves upon the ocean. If they could recognize this, they would cease to be engrossed in this world and would find within themselves shoreless seas. And God is a warrant for what we say!

If you should ask, "What has come to pass for people such that [the world] has seized their hearts and limbs despite their scholars, righteous ones, and leaders?" I would answer that what has happened has happened to everyone except for rare exceptions, and matters are not judged by rare exceptions! And I heard my master ؓ say, "The world has entered the knowledge of the scholars and the poverty of *fuqarā'*, and has robbed them of their essential meanings." What he said is indeed the situation. *Peace!*

LETTER 54

Turning towards your Lord

IF YOU WISH for your needs to be fulfilled without toiling in the world, then turn away from your needs and turn towards your Lord and they will be fulfilled, God willing. If you were to abandon them totally and turn towards your Lord, He would give you what you want of the goodness of this world and the Next, and there would be for you a Way in the heavens just as there is a Way upon earth, and more. This is as the Prophet ﷺ said relating the words of His Lord: "To the one who is too busy with My remembrance (*dhikrī*) to ask Me [for something], I shall give more than I give to those who ask Me."[108] And hear, O *faqīr*, what I said to some of the brothers, may God be pleased with them: "I have never been in need of anything and then turned away from it and towards my Lord except that I then found it before me, be it something great or small, by the power of the Hearer, the Knower." And I have also seen that the needs of the generality of people are fulfilled by labor in the world, and the needs of the elect are fulfilled by turning away from them and towards God. *Peace!*

---

[106] See footnote 17.

[107] Echoing Q. 2:18 and 2:171.

⁂

LETTER 55

Veneration

SOMEONE WHOSE EGO has been effaced, someone who is drowned in the contemplation of the Divine Immensity, must necessarily be venerated by all God's servant—and may God's curse be upon the one who lies—while someone who has not been drowned in this contemplation will not be thus venerated by people. People venerate the one who venerates God, or we could say, who venerates God's commandments. To take God's commandments lightly shows a lack of knowledge of the One Who Commands. If he venerates God's commandments, God will venerate him, and if God venerates him, so do God's creatures. *Peace!*

⁂

LETTER 56

The man who became impressed with his spiritual knowledge

THERE WAS A certain person who was with us for about eight years and during that whole time, his love for us waxed and waned. Then one day while I was with him, I conveyed to him a teaching that went straight to the depths of his heart—but God knows best—and because of that, he withdrew to some extent from the world and experienced a great attraction towards our Way. Spiritual insights and their forces begin to flood his being, something he had never experienced before, and they continued to come to him one after another until he began to think that there was no one on the face of the earth who knew more than he. At that moment he hastened to come and tell me what he knew, since he lived in one place and I in another. But after I had spoken with him and responded to what he had to say, he stubbornly and angrily threw my words back in my face, all this in front of the brothers, may God be pleased with them. Since he had never behaved to me in such a way before, I forgave him, but he did not forgive me. Instead, he continued to attack me aggressively with his knowledge as if I were a thief before the man he had robbed. I could not accept any of what he said except what I found to be right and indisputable, but when I declined to agree with him [on everything], he left us and went off to be with some other brothers who, although they had a good intention and love towards me, were weak in their spiritual state since they were supported only by the strength of studying books, [and what he told them] shook them in their resolve, love, and sincerity, and nearly dragged them off the path despite their good intention and love.

---

[108] Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab al-Īmān*, Bukhārī, *al-Tārīkh*.

May God be merciful to him, what he wanted from us was that we leave our life of withdrawal (*tajrīd*) and return to the workaday world. I told him, "If we returned to what you desire for us, it would be all right for us, since all of us know both sides of life, but in your case, there is really nothing for you to do except flee from the sensory before it seizes you completely as it has so many like you, even those whose spiritual states were much stronger than yours. This is essential if you hope to save yourself, so hear what I am saying to you, follow my advice and not something else, and may God take you by the hand. You are now very close to the sensory world, dear brother, because you know nothing else, like most people, or even worse. You do not really know the spiritual world or the path which leads to it. So if you wish to reach it, flee from the sensory world, but if you desire that world, then do not expect to reach the spiritual world nor set your heart on it. All that brings increase in the sensory diminishes in the spiritual and vice versa, all that weakens one in the sensory domain, strengthens one in the spiritual domain and vice versa." But he did not accept what we had to say, and indeed the sensory world which we had warned him against snatched from him of all the spiritual insights that had come to him with their forces, such that he was left with not even the faintest whiff of their perfume. And God is a warrant for what we say. *Peace!*

⁂

LETTER 57

On moderation in practice and the completion of sanctity

CONCERNING THE INVOCATION you spoke to me about: if you increase in it, God will bring you closer, but beware that you do not practice it so much that you become worn out and weary, for the Prophet ﷺ said, "Only take on the practice that you have the strength to do, for while God does not grow weary, you yourselves do."[109] And as the saint Sīdī al-Buṣīrī ؓ said in his *Burda*:

> Beware the snares of hunger and satiety,
> For an empty stomach may be worse than over-eating.[110]

If we are truly detached inwardly, that is, in our heart, then our outer dimension will be detached as well, and otherwise, not. The sanctity of any one of us is not complete unless who we are inwardly is who we are outwardly, and vice versa. And there is no doubt that the contemplation of those people of God—or I might say, those people of the Way ؓ—who have outwardly and inwardly become detached from the world is more powerful than the contemplation of those who are still involved in it, and their station higher as well, since it is based on inward and outward emptiness [for God]. There is also no doubt that the outward dimension will follow the religion of the inward dimension[111] and both its profit and loss will arise there, for it is the source, even as the Prophet ﷺ said, "Truly, in the body there is a piece of flesh that if it is sound, the whole body is sound, and if it is corrupt, the whole body is corrupt, and truly, that is the heart."[112] And in the *Ḥikam* of Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh it is stated: "Whatever is deposited in the invisible world of innermost hearts is manifested in the visible world of phenomena." [28] This is what brought us to a life of detachment from the world as it has others as well. Without doubt, it is a great station, which the saint Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh ﵁ called, "the lofty station," when he said in the *Ḥikam*[2], "Your desire to be detached from the world even though God has put you in the world to gain a living is a hidden passion, and your desire to gain a living in the world even though God has put you in a state of detachment from the world is a come down from a lofty aspiration."

---

[109] Found in Bukhārī, Muslim, and many other sources.

[110] *The Burda*, *op. cit.*, line 22. The lines in this context mean that in ascetic practices there can also be a danger of either of over-doing something or taking pride in it.

[111] Echoing the *ḥadīth* in the *Sunan* collections of Abū Dāwūd and Tirmidhī, the *Musnad* of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab al-Īmān*, and others: "A person follows the religion of his dearest friend, so be careful of whom you take as your dearest friend."

However, I would like you to forget yourself, forget both "detachment" and "the workaday world," and everything else, and remember your Lord—may God take you by the hand! *And when you are resolved, trust in God* [3:159]. When you have become detached from your worldly work, your illumination will grow stronger, and by its strength, your certitude will strengthen, and by its strength, your aspirations will become higher, and by the loftiness of your aspirations, you will reach your Lord, which is to say you will reach the knowledge of your Lord. *Peace!*

LETTER 58

To a disciple whose state wavers

THE STATE WHICH we see outwardly on a *faqīr* is not other than the one that is within him, even as the *Ḥikam* states, "Whatever is deposited in the invisible world of innermost hearts is manifested in the visible world of phenomena" [28]. And we see, O *faqīr*, that sometimes you incline towards the people of the outward and sometimes towards the people of the inward; sometimes you turn towards both directions and sometimes you turn away from them both; sometimes you are full of energy and sometimes you are lazy and weary; sometimes you accept the Truth and sometimes not ... and so forth. We see that although your words are the words of the Sufis ﵁, your desires are playing tricks on you, and this situation is not letting up. Indeed, I felt sorry for you and

---

[112] In Bukhārī, Muslim, and all other main *ḥadith* sources.

I wanted to give you some counsel. The best advice I have for you is to turn towards your Lord in repentance for letting desires play with you, and then apply only what God Most High says in His Word, *Were you to obey most of those on earth, they would lead you astray from the way of God* [6:116]. There is no doubt that your salvation, my salvation, and the salvation of every single one of us lies in following the people of the Muhammadan *sunna*,[113] those who form the community about which the Prophet ﷺ said, "The Hand of God is with the community"[114] for without a doubt they are the ones keeping God's covenant, and even if they are few, they are many. Indeed, a whole community can be in one man if his feet are firmly planted in the *sunna* of the Messenger of God ﷺ, outwardly and inwardly, while there is no community if they are not. One man can be an entire nation if his heart is like the heart of the Prophet of God Most High our master Abraham ﷺ, of whom God says in His Book, *Truly Abraham was a community, devoutly obedient to God* [16:120]. *Peace!*

LETTER 59

Repelling demonic thoughts

IF DEMONIC AND egoistic thoughts overpower you and you wish to be rid of them or to defend yourself against them, then turn away from them and towards your Lord, and relinquish to God your will concerning yourself. Be that way always and they will depart from you and never again return. *Peace!*

LETTER 60

On receiving the rain of divine inspiration

IF SOMEONE WANTS this verse—*you see the mountains that you suppose are solid pass away like clouds* [27:88]—to apply to him as it has to others, then let him be satisfied with the least portion of this world and constantly wean his soul away from it, following the way of the Messenger of God ﷺ, and let him also look upon his teachers, his brothers, and all the servants of his Lord with respect. If he follows what we say, divine inspirations—gifts of knowledge granted by God—will flood his being like water that is carried by the clouds of mercy, the thunder of mercy, the wind of mercy, the lightning of mercy, and the coldness of mercy, until it becomes the rain of mercy that descends into his heart at every time and place. And each will be a new knowledge and a new practice, and each will be so sweet and full of delight that it will cause the previous to be forgotten.[115] *Peace!*

---

[113] See footnote 40 for the context in which the Shaykh is using the word *sunna* here.

[114] This *ḥadīth* in the *Sunan* collections of Tirmidhī, Nasāᶜī, and Ibn Ḥibbān, as well as in Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab al-Īmān*.

LETTER 61

The inward and the outward

O *FAQĪR*! you cannot put your strength both into something outward and also into something inward. If do so for what is outward, you cannot do so for what is inward. Also, the inward dimension will not expand unless the outward narrows, and vice versa, and divinely endowed knowledge will not come to you as long as you are taken up by formal knowledge. There will be no inner presence as long as you are taken up by the outward, for it is impossible to have strength in both. Whenever it is outward, it will not be inward, and whenever it is inward, it will not be outward. Inclination must be towards one and not the other, even as God Most High says: *You will not be able to deal fairly between women, even if it is your ardent desire, but do not turn away from one altogether* [4:129]. So we are not saying that one of them is without value, but rather that to try to combine the way of divine attraction with the way of methodic practice, or the Truth with the Law, or intoxication with sobriety, or union with separation is impossible for anyone except the most powerful of the saints ؓ. As for the rest, there will be methodic practice without divine attraction or vice versa, there will be [a focus on] the Law but not the Truth or vice versa; there will be union without separation or vice versa, there will be intoxication without sobriety or vice versa. And there may be [people in whom there is] neither method nor attraction. This happens, except that it concerns a gathering of donkeys or something close to it! *Peace!*

---

[115] That is, divine inspirations and insights lead to new understanding and hence new knowledge. This renews and deepens practice, and this renewed practice leads to ever newer knowledge, and in both the practice and knowledge the traveler finds a sweetness that effaces what he or she had tasted before.

⁂

LETTER 62

The worst disease

THE WORST DISEASE, O *faqīr*, is the love (*ḥubb*) of this world which infects the heart, not the abscess (*ḥabb*) which infects the body.[116] It is because of the world that we are removed from our Lord. If it were not for its love which occupies our hearts, we would be perpetually in the presence of our Lord. Nothing veils us from the Lord except the love of the world residing in our hearts. *Peace!*

⁂

LETTER 63

On the value of intention

THE TRUE ELIXIR is intention.[117] If it is present for someone, then goodness is present, and if it absent, then goodness is absent. And even though there was no one greater in creation than our Prophet ﷺ, and his rank was exalted and his import mighty, [still he was always careful to make sure that his intention was correct]. If right intention is present for someone, he gains something of value, and if not, not.

---

[116] The two words are spelled exactly the same in Arabic, except for the vowel. It is very possible that by "abscess" the Shaykh is referring to the symptoms of the plague, which struck a large portion of Morocco in 1799-1800.

[117] *Al-niyya*. Here is referring to the *ḥadīth* which occurs towards the beginning of most collections, including Bukhārī, Muslim, and the other principal books: "Verily, actions are reckoned according to intentions, and each [shall reap the fruits] of what he intends. So he whose migration is for the sake of God and His Prophet ﷺ, his migration is for the sake of God and His Prophet, and he whose migration is for the sake of this world, to gain some of it, or for a woman, to marry her, then his migration is for that sake."

LETTER 64

Detachment from the world

O FAQĪR, if the world offers itself to someone and he does not turn away from it as his Prophet ﷺ did, then he is among the deluded or even the lost. How could it be otherwise, when he is turning his back on the *sunna* and accepting innovation instead—and we take refuge in God from that! And if the Prophet ﷺ had seen that it would not harm us, then why did he turn away from it when it was offered to him.[118] We seek refuge in God that He should allow us to trade what is eternal for what is perishing. So do not let yourself be deceived by some view that is opposed to his ﷺ and take a lesson from the man whose story in the Book of God is well known: *And among them are those who make a pact with God [saying], "If He gives unto us from His Bounty, we will surely spend in charity, and we will surely be among the righteous."* [9:75][119] Be satisfied [with little of this world], wean yourselves away from it always, and you will be joyful. Take from it only what is indispensable and do not have [so many] choices concerning your food, your clothes, your home, your mount, or any of your affairs whatever they are. Accept what you find of them and be content and satisfied with it, for to be content with what we have is the greatest form of wealth, and the *life which is wholesome and good* according to some commentators.[120] God may blind the heart of someone who takes more than what is necessary. Indeed, it is part of God's perfect favor to His servant to give him what is sufficient and keep from him what would cause him to transgress, even as He has said, *Had God outspread His provision for His servants, they would have behaved tyrannically upon the earth ...* [42:27]. And as conveyed [from the Prophet ﷺ]: "The best invocation is silent (*khafī*) and the best provision is what is enough (*yakfī*)."[121]

---

[118] This refers in part to a *ḥadīth* found in the *Musnad* of Imam Aḥmad, Ibn Ḥibban's *Ṣaḥīḥ*, and other sources:

[The angel] Gabriel sat before the Prophet ﷺ and then looked up into the sky, and behold, there was an angel descending. Gabriel ؑ said, "This angel was created before the Hour and has never descended before today." When the angel had descended, he said, 'O Muḥammad, your Lord has sent me to you to ask: should I make you a king and a prophet or a servant and a messenger (*ʿabdan rasūlan*)? Gabriel said, "O Muḥammad, be humble for your Lord." And the Prophet ﷺ answered, "I would rather be a servant and a messenger."

[119] According to some commentators, this verse concerns Thaʿlabah ibn Ḥāṭib who asked the Prophet ﷺ to pray to God to give him wealth, from which he promised to give in charity. The Prophet ﷺ, after warning him that "a little for which you can be thankful is better than a lot for which you cannot," prayed for him. Thaʿalabah did indeed, begin to prosper, and as he became more and more prosperous, he stopping offering the prayer in assembly, then left it all together and refused to pay zakāt when it became a religious duty.

It has also been said, "The world is like Saul's river: no one who drinks from it is saved except the one who takes only a handful."[122] How amazing it is that someone imprisoned in the land of Islam should feel sadness over someone imprisoned in the land of disbelief and that he should be unaware that he himself is a prisoner in his own land and that his sadness and tears for someone in prison among the disbelievers should actually be for his own soul. It is bad that someone should be imprisoned at the hands of his foe and be unaware of it, but worse than that is the situation of someone who is aware of it but does not ransom himself, and still worse than that is someone who lives for many years [in that state] and does not ransom himself from it but rather stays in the clutches of his foe until he dies in his hands.

Someone who has any sense should not grieve over prisoners in the hands of foreigners until he himself is not a prisoner of the world, his ego, the devil (may God curse him), and his desires, or I would say his illusions.

---

[120] He is referring to Q. 16:97: *Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has faith, verily, to him will We give a new Life, a life that is wholesome and good, and reward them for the best of what they did.* Most Qur'anic commentaries define that life as, "contentment and sufficiency in this world" and also "lawful provision (*rizqun ḥalālun*)."

[121] A *ḥadīth* found in Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab al-Īmān*, Ibn Mubārak, *Musnad*, and other sources.

[122] This saying appears in Ibn ᶜAjība's spiritual allusion on verse 2:249: *So when Saul departed with the forces, he said: Surely God will test you with a river; whoever then drinks from it, he is not of me, and whoever does not taste of it, he is surely of me, except he who takes with his hand as much of it as fills the hand ...* There he says, "The world is like Saul's river: no one is delivered from it except he who abstains from drinking from it altogether or drinks only a handful" *Baḥr al-Madīd*, vol. 2, p. 277.

I am tested by four who shoot at me with arrows
from a bow that is ever taut:
The Devil, the world, my ego, and its desires
—only You, Lord, can save me![123]

O *faqīr*, once you ransom yourself from those enemies who are always with you, then there is nothing wrong in your grieving for those imprisoned by the foreigners, and if, in your concern and worry for them, you weep until your eyes are red or even blind, and you will have a vast reward and precious recompense.[124] *Peace!*

⁂

LETTER 65

About detachment from the workaday world *(al-tajrīd)*

WE WOULD NOT like anyone to give up the workaday world unless he has first repented from all sins and not returned to them, for "the one who repents from sin is like one who has no sins."[125] Moreover, he should always and forever flee from things that do not concern him. If someone has emptied his soul of the things we have mentioned, then it is all right for him to give up the workaday world and its trappings. When he has rid himself of his ego's pursuits, he will be beautified by spiritual insights.[126] There is no doubt—as we have said many times: when we oppose our egos' desires, it results in divinely inspired knowledge, and that knowledge results in greater certitude, and that certitude erases doubts and illusions completely and plunges the one who has it into the Divine Presence. Once he becomes beautified by the spiritual which comes to him in the form of inspiration and insight from the Presence of his Lord, we no longer fear that he will return to what he gave up. This is like grafting a branch of one tree onto another: you have to cut back many branches so that the sap may return to [the trunk]. Then it will survive, grow strong, and flourish.

---

[123] The author of these oft-quoted lines is unknown.

[124] During the reign of the sultan Sīdī Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdallāh (see our introduction to these letters), Morocco had several battles against the Spanish and Portuguese. This letter may possibly refer to the unsuccessful attempt to reclaim Melilla from Spain in 1774 CE.

[125] *Ḥadīth* found in Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab al-Īmān*, and mentioned in a number of the standard Qur'anic commentaries.

[126] See footnote 35 concerning *takhliyya* and *taḥliyya*.

Giving up the workaday world (*al-tajrīd*) means four things: retreating from the world, retreating from people, not caring about the body, and not caring about the stomach.[127] Unlike the generality of people, the one in this state has no concern for his body or his stomach; he gives them no import. Also, [in trying to reach] complete sincerity, he might do things which appear objectionable to people. For example, he might walk through the marketplace eating radishes, or turnips, or carrots, or herbs, or kebab, or boiled chick peas, or fried doughnuts, or grilled meat, or crepes. If he does this, however, we want him to do it only around important people who might see him and distain him for it. If such people are not around, or he is in the company of humble folk, he should refrain from such things because they are too easy for him, and this [practice] should not be easy. Rather, he should be like a dog or less than a dog. So he will bare his head in front of the [important] people we have mentioned and others, such as his relatives, companions, and friends.[128] He will beg from people like a man in desperate need or in whatever way he can. He will take large bites when he eats, and open his mouth when he does so; he will wear a tunic inside out; when he sits down, he will stretch out his legs, not fold them under him. Sometimes he will leave his side bare down to his waist, but not so much that he uncovers what should be covered in observance of the Muhammadan Law, so that anyone who sees him knows that he is still sane. He will also keep silent before anyone who attacks him if there are present those who he would prefer were not present to such a scene. He will also wear an old prayer cap, tattered but clean.

There is nothing the people of sincerity love more than ways by which they can appear lowly in the eyes of people; such is their habit and such is their state. For us, there is no doubt that what we have mentioned, which for others would be ill manners, is for them an ascetic practice. *Peace!*

---

[127] That is, to be unconcerned about what one wears (as long as it is clean) and about what one eats (as long as it is lawful).

[128] During the Shaykh's day, and up until the twentieth center, it was considered a mark of utter poverty or insanity for a man to appear in public without some head covering, usually a turban.

LETTER 66

Caution against trespassing the limits of the Law

LISTEN, O *fuqarā'* ! I would like anyone of you who is seeking to break the habits of his ego to be very careful not to fall into something which is either forbidden or disapproved, so that illuminating spiritual truth is not turned into benighting spiritual truth,[129] as has happened to many people of the Way. I have seen a person depart from to the Muhammadan Law without so much as a care, and when I said to him, "Fear your Lord!" he answered, "There is no He but He!"[130] even though his own soul was like the soul of Pharaoh and Nimrod, and there is no strength nor power but through God!

It is not allowed for a disciple or anyone else to be in such a state unless he has been so overcome by [spiritual] intoxication that he has lost his senses and is unaware completely, like the famous saint Abū al-Ḥasan ᶜAlī ibn Ḥamdūsh in Zerhūn,[b] or the noble saint Sīdī Muḥammad ibn Raysūn al-ᶜAlamī in Tāzrūt, or their likes, may God be pleased with them. People like them, lost to their senses in a vision of the immensity of their Lord, are excused and not held to account, for "the blood money is upon the slayer!." [131] But someone whose ego is like the ego of Pharaoh and Nimrod has no legal excuse and should be taken to task severely unless there is no one who can deliver the legal punishment, in which case his situation remains with God. And if he acts outside the Law, then he and Pharaoh and Nimrod and Abū Jahl—may God curse them—are equal, one no different from the other—and may God preserve us inwardly and outwardly from all transgressions. *Peace!*

---

[129] See footnote 38.

[130] Here he is referring to those who have misunderstood what the school of Ibn ᶜArabī termed *waḥdat al-wujūd*, the oneness of being.

[131] The expression *al-diyatu ᶜalā'l-qātil*, "the blood money is upon the slayer," or in another version, *ᶜala'l-ᶜāqilah* "upon the underwriter," literally refers to the law relating to the payment of compensation in the case of an accidental death. The Sufis borrowed this saying to express the situation of someone who, in an ecstatic state of nearness, may say or do something in error. See Ibn ᶜAbbād al-Rundī's commentary on the first aphorism of the *Ḥikam* in *Ghayth al-muwāhib al-ᶜaliyya fī sharḥ al-Ḥikam al-ᶜaṭā'iyya*, ed. by ᶜAbd al-Ḥalim Maḥmūd, Dar al-Maᶜārif, Cairo, undated, vol. 1, p. 49.

⁂

LETTER 67

The face of freedom

WHOSOEVER WISHES FREEDOM to show him her[132] face should show her the face of servanthood, meaning pure intention, sincere love, good opinion,[133] noble character, and observance of the Divine commandments and prohibitions without change or alteration. Then will she show him her face and no longer cover it from him. *Peace!*

⁂

LETTER 68

A little worship done with a good state is better than a lot done with a bad state

O SHAYKH! Do not charge someone who comes to you with constantly repeating *Allāh ... Allāh ... Allāh,* or constantly praying, or constantly fasting while he passionately loves the world and loves idle chatter. Rather, charge him with accomplishing the obligatory worship and the confirmed *sunna*, staying out of what does not concern him, and developing noble character. Then if he invokes God's Name one time, or offers one prayer, or recites one sūra, or the like ... and does so with the noble state we have mentioned, it will be better for him than doing things a thousand times with the reprehensible state of loving the world, indulging in idle chatter, and drowning in error. May God deliver us all! *Peace!*

---

[132] Freedom, *al-ḥurriyya*, is a feminine noun in Arabic and we have retained the feminine possessive adjective to express the sense of a beautiful woman lifting her veil that comes through the text.

[133] The Shaykh mentions *ḥusn al-ẓann* (a good opinion) and *suᶜ al-ẓann* (a bad opinion) either of God or people a number of times throughout the letters. These terms, found many times in *ḥadīth*, could also be rendered "expecting goodness or expecting bad," and could even be seen as "optimism" or "pessimism" in how one approaches all things.

LETTER 69

The Shaykh's call; the mystery of permission (*al-idhn*); God's speech

WHEN I WAS graced by finding my master ؓ in the year 1182 CE,[134] he gave me permission to receive into the Ṭarīqa a certain teacher who had instructed me in recitation of the Mighty Qur'ān. He had resolved to take my master as his shaykh in the Way that I had done, and he had wanted permission from the Shaykh himself and so had contacted me about that. When I had told my master ؓ about this, he said, "You take his hand, for you knew him before this." So I conveyed what my master ؓ had said to him and I benefitted him with the teaching I had received by the blessing of the permission of my noble master ؓ.

Then a period of time passed between me and and my master because I had to leave Fes and return to my homeland of Banī Zarwāl, may God bless it, while my master remained in Fes al-Bālī. When I was ready to depart, I said to him, "There is no one there with whom to share the Way, and the Way is maintained through companionship." He answered me, "Give birth to them!" as if this figurative birth could come about through me or as if he had already seen it. I repeated what I had said to him, and again he said, "Give birth to them!" And by the blessing of the permission he had and his own spiritual secret, there came to me a man—may God make many others like him in Islam—and from the moment we met each other, God answered his prayer, and he reached the stations of effacement and sustenance (*al-fanā wa'l-baqā*) in one leap. And may God be a warrant for what I say.

Then did the grace of permission and its secret appear to me and rid me of doubts and illusions, may praise and thanks be to God. Following this, my soul longed to receive permission from God and His Messenger ﷺ and I sought for it with great urgency and need until one day I was in a deserted place in the middle of the woods in a state of intoxication and sobriety, completely immersed in my intoxication and completely immersed in my sobriety, combining the two and with great strength in both, when I heard words that came from every part of my being: *And remind, for truly the Reminder benefits the believers* [51:55].[135] Upon hearing this, my heart became calm and tranquil for I was sure that the words were from God and His Messenger ﷺ and that I was in both noble presences: the divine and the prophetic. God had produced something supernatural in my entire being of which the "how" is known only to the One Who brought it forth.

---

[134] 1768.

For God, be He glorified, sometimes speaks to His servant from his very soul, as happened to me and others, about which the saint, Sīdī Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Shushtarī ؓ[b] said,

> I heard a discourse from my soul,
> From a place very near.
> O my life, You are present in my essence
> And from me You never disappear.

At other times, God speaks to His servant through other human beings, or through inanimate objects, or through animals, or through the air, or from a single direction, or from all—no one knows this except the one to whom God wishes to make it known, and no one would have the strength to bear it unless God strengthened him.

---

[135] This experience of the Divine Voice recalls the commentary of Imam Rāzī on Q. 20:12: *And when (Moses) came to (the fire), he was called*: *O Moses, put off your sandals for you are in the sacred valley of Ṭuwā*: "When Moses (upon whom be peace) beheld the fire rising up from the tree into the sky and heard the glorifications of the angels, he covered his eyes with his hands. Then he was called to, 'O Moses!' and he answered, 'I am at Your service! (*Labayka*). I hear Your voice but do not see You. Where are You?'. And God answered, 'I am with You, before You, behind You, surrounding You, and I am nearer to you than you are to yourself'. Then Iblīs cast doubt into the mind of Moses, saying, 'How do you know you are hearing the Words of God?'. And Moses answered, 'Because I hear these words from above me and below me and behind me and on my right and on my left, even as I hear them from before me. And so I know that this is not the speech of a created being, and that it came from all directions at once so that I might hear God with every part of me, with every limb, and so that my whole body might become a single ear'."

The noble verse of the Qur'ān by which I was addressed from my entire being remained intermingled with my flesh and blood for a period of ten days or more, and after I received this permission, the faithful began coming to me. As soon as we saw one another, we would begin reminding one another, benefitting from one another, and profiting from one another, and there came to pass what came to pass: goodness and mystery, excellence, blessing, and divine support. All this took place in the land of the Banī Zarwāl Tribe, may God defend it from all affliction. Praise and thanks be to God. *Peace!*

⁂

LETTER 70

Benefitting from Spiritual Instruction

THE REASON A *faqīr* does not benefit from the instructions of a spiritual teacher is that he has not departed from this sensory world for the spiritual world. If he had, he would benefit from instruction. Only one who exists—who has been born into the world of the spirit—can be instructed. Otherwise, how can someone who does not yet exist be instructed? As people say, "Wait till it's born—then we'll give it a name!"[136]. So, O *faqīr*, if you want to instruct someone, you first need to be the means by which they are born into the world of the spirit. When you accomplish that, then you can instruct them and they will be instructed.

I myself have reflected as deeply as I could upon [the situation of] my brothers, the *fuqarā'*, and have not found any who have departed from the sensory world except for a few rare exceptions, and you cannot judge based on exceptions. Their states, by God, saddened me greatly. I reflected, too, on what was preventing them from receiving spiritual insights even though they had distanced themselves from the workaday world and its trappings, as well as from friends and companions, and I found that it was their love of this world and dependence upon it. May God be kind to them, after they had entered the way of *tajrīd* as I mentioned,[137] they went to excess in begging, because they still loved the world and depended upon it. Even someone who was sincere in the Way might go to excess in begging without any need to do so, but for someone from whose heart the love of the world has departed, there is no need for excess.

---

[136] This is in dialectical Moroccan Arabic and might be said by expectant parents.

[137] See footnote 34.

So note this well, O *faqīr*, and pass it on to anyone you like: "If you wish for spiritual inspiration to come to you as it has to the souls of the sincere, and even more so, then distance yourself from the world and from all the rest of your desires. Then will this inspiration come to you along with its vast and powerful forces and it will take you to itself even despite yourselves .... Without a doubt, God Most High has made for you and for every human being as many spiritual insights and inspirations as He has made waves upon the sea, and if you came to know them, nothing would distract you from them—and if you came to know them, you would find within yourselves shoreless seas. And God is a warrant for what we say. *Peace!*

⁂

LETTER 71

Having high aspiration

O FAQĪR! be always of high aspiration and you will see marvels. If you ask what that means, I would mention this: When the Saᶜdī Ruler, Mūlay Aḥmad al-Dhahabī ﵁[b] asked the famous saint, Sīdī Abū al-Shitā' al-Khammār,[b] whether he should make him a sanctuary stretching from Wādī Sibū to Wādī Wargha, he answered, "God Most High has already made me a sanctuary that stretches from the Throne to the pallet." And once Aḥmad al-Khiḍr ﵇[138] greeted the saint ᶜAbd al-Salām al-Aghzāwī ﵁ who returned his greeting and then went back to what his was doing. So al-Khiḍr asked him, "That's all? Do you know who I am?" He answered, "Who are you?" He said, "I am Khiḍr!" He said, "So what do you need?"

---

[138] Al-Khiḍr or al-Khaḍr ("The green one") is a figure mentioned in *Sūrat al-Kahf*, verses 60 through 82, who meets Moses ﵇ and imparts to him spiritual teachings through three experiences which appear to violate the law (see footnote 238 below). He is believed to live eternally in this world and is reported to have been seen by various saintly people over the ages. For more background about this mysterious figure, see Halman, *Where the Two Seas Meet.*

Such is the way it is for people with high aspiration, and without it, not. *Peace!*

⁂

LETTER 72

A little practice with a pure heart is better than much without

I SAID TO one of those who pretend (to be of the Way) but whose hearts are full of rancor, envy, pride, arrogance, miserliness, greed and other vices:

"Be pure of heart and cut down the number of Prayers you offer as well as other acts of worship. Maintain only the obligatory and the confirmed *sunna*, and do not add to these at all, for a lot of physical devotions with a diseased heart will not avail you, no matter what you do. What will avail you is to have peace in your heart and to accomplish what God has enjoined upon you. The least physical devotions in this state will suffice you, while fasting by day and keeping vigils by night—a whole lifetime of worship—will not suffice you if your heart is diseased and you are engrossed in what God does not like for you. We seek refuge in God from the state you and others like you are in." *Peace!*

⁂

LETTER 73

Putting the limbs in accord with the heart

I SEE A lot of *fuqarā'*, a lot of students of religious knowledge, and a lot of people in general who perform a lot of physical worship and yet they are not touched by its spiritual mystery as much as others who accomplish very little—since no one is without this mystery except the ignorant or forsaken. It appears to me that the reason for this is that they are reluctant to truly turn towards their Lord. Even after having rejected their desires and after having turned to God with the members of their bodies,[139] their hearts remain as heedless as they were before, and that is a vile state (may God protect us from it). If their hearts were

---

[139] That is, in physical devotions such as supererogatory prayers and fasting.

[as devoted as] their bodies, they would see mysteries and extraordinary benefits. *Peace!*

⁂

LETTER 74

A letter to certain *fuqahā* opposed to the Way

KNOW, O *faqīr*, that I wrote to some of the *fuqahā* who were opposed to our Way:

"May peace be upon you and may God be kind to you and deliver you and us from every error. It has reached me that you have decided to give up [trying to correct] your own faults and have occupied yourselves with the faults of others. Do you not know that in the Book of God it says: *Will you enjoin piety upon mankind, and forget yourselves?* [2:44], or are you yourselves faultless? But far be it for someone who is faultless to see other than the Beloved. In truth, the one who most sees faults in others is the one who has them himself, and what fault is worse than to see only what is other than God, which is precisely what you are seeing from early morning to late at night. There is no doubt that both the beautiful and the ugly[140] see in people their own reflections. Be beautiful and you will see those who are beautiful; be ugly and you will see those who are ugly. As Shaykh al-Buṣīrī[b] said:

> ... The eye may reject the sun's light when it is inflamed,
> And when the body is unwell, the mouth may shun
> even the taste of sweet water.[141]

And this is true: if we are sick, even sweet water can taste bitter to our mouths, and if our spiritual faces are beautiful, our physical faces will be beautiful as well. People are only a mirror to those who look at them, and so he whose "face" is goodly sees in them a beautiful face, and he whose "face" is ugly sees in them an ugly face. It is impossible for someone whose soul is beautiful to see one who is ugly, and it is impossible for someone whose soul is ugly to see one who is beautiful.

---

[140] That is, those who are spiritually beautiful or ugly—the virtuous and the vicious.

[141] *The Burda*, *op. cit.*, line 104.

Or as the great Shaykh Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Kharūbī ﵁ [b] said:

> Say to those who see in us what they criticize:
> "Our drink is so pure that your faces are mirrored in it."

Indeed, I was once among the *fuqahā* like you and even worse than you, and we used to try to find what was wrong in peoples' states and what was right in ours. And there have been, in fact, many others like us: the great shaykh and saint ᶜIzz al-Dīn ibn ᶜAbd al-Salām, Imam al-Ghazālī, Tāj al-Dīn Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh, Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī,[b] and others like them ﵃. After God had opened their eyes, illuminated their souls, and removed the veil of illusion from before them, they sought for what was ugly but did not find so much as a word about it. And listen, O *fuqahā*, to what one of them said: "If I were charged with finding other than God, I would not be able to do so, for there is nothing else besides Him that I can see." And also:

> Say "Allāh!" and let go of existence with all it contains,
> If you desire the attainment of perfection.
>
> For everything other than God, were you to realize it,
> Is nothing, whether in part or as a whole.
>
> And know that you and all the worlds,
> Were it not for Him, would be obliterated and destroyed.
>
> As for the one who has no existence in and of himself,
> Were it not for God, 'his' existence would be utterly impossible.
>
> The gnostics have been annihilated—they perceive
> Nothing but the Imperious, the Most Exalted.
>
> They see what is other than Him destroyed in actuality,
> In the present, in the past, and in the future.[142]

And other like things.

Indeed, the issue of invocation is vast, and God's grace, and mercy, generosity and excellence are vaster still. So do you really find nothing else to criticize, abhor, find unbearable, and heavy except the invocation of God Most High in God's houses (the mosques), something which He has commanded us to do in His words: ... *In houses that God has permitted to be raised and wherein His Name is remembered* [24:36].[143] You [say you] are worshipping your Lord while those you mention are bothering you. If this were the case, it would indeed be unacceptable and the ones doing it should be reprimanded. No one would approve of it except an ignorant or self-satisfied person. But we do not see many in your area worshipping God as you claim. Rather, we see certain students who study books of religious knowledge and then do not offer the Prayer most of the time. And as for the use of tobacco and hashish, or sodomy, back-biting, gossip, and other such vices which our Lord has forbidden us, there is not a word of criticism from you or from them about it.[144] Yet I see you hastening to criticize the people of the Way ﵇ with a haste you have for nothing else and the tribulation arising from what you are doing has spread through the land.[145] The people of the Way who have repented from those vices—those and only those are the ones you busy yourselves in criticizing. But as for you own faults—has God Most High granted you safety from them? Exalted be He above that, *None feels secure from God's plotting, save the people who are losers* [7:99].

---

[142] The lines are from Abū Madyan as translated in Cornell, *op. cit.* p. 168.

The main point of this is that if you would like counsel and safety from disgrace, then turn to your Lord in repentance from your sins, as God Most High says in His Book, *And repent unto God all together* [24:31], and the Prophet ﷺ said, "Turn in repentance to God, for truly I turn to Him seventy times a day," or in another *ḥadīth*, "one hundred times,"[146] and this is from someone whose past and future sins had been forgiven.[147] In his case ﷺ, I believe that he was always ascending to higher spiritual stations and when he would reach [a new] one, and find it higher than the one before (and if he found it higher, how sublime it must have been!), he would ask God's forgiveness for the one he had been in before it. Would that we could ever reach a station from which he repented! Indeed, the good deeds of the righteous are the faults of saintly and the good deeds of the saintly are the faults of *those brought near.*[148]

---

[143] Apparently, these *fuqahā'* were critical of certain Sufis who were invoking God aloud in the mosque.

[144] The implication is that these vices were associated with students of formal knowledge.

[145] It is possible that the Shaykh is referring to the Wahhabī movement which was making inroads in Morocco at the time. See the Introduction, p. xvii.

[146] Both versions can be found in Bukhārī, Abū Dāwūd, Tirmidhī, and other main sources.

It is absolutely essential that you turn to God in repentance, redress any wrongs you have done, avoid lying, back-biting, gossip, and both what is disapproved and what is forbidden. Beware of the sins, both apparent and hidden, which have filled your hearts. As for the apparent, those are what you are committing, O heedless students of knowledge, which we have mentioned to you and made clear. And as for the hidden, by these we mean pride, ostentation, envy, vanity, back-biting, gossip, lewdness, foolishness, greed, miserliness, and other such things which are not allowed to fill the heart of the faithful. What is allowed is for that person to cleanse his heart from them, by night before the day comes, seated before standing, if he is able. If not, then he should search the entire land, both the towns and the wilderness, for a physician and if he finds one, he should not leave him, but rather stay near him until he has helped him purify his heart from the sins which have afflicted it and from all other faults. If he cannot find one in Morocco, then let him head for the East, may God protect it, as soon as possible without waiting for the Pilgrims' caravans, so that he does not delay his repentance, for to do so is a sin in itself which requires another repentance. But "The one who repents from sin is like the one who has no sins,"[149] and in God's book it is written: *Your Lord has prescribed*

---

[147] He is referring to the first two first verses of *Sūrat al-Fatḥ*: *Truly We have granted you a manifest victory, that God may forgive you your sins that went before and that which is to come, and complete His Blessing upon you, and guide you upon a straight path* [48:1-2].

[148] "The good deeds of the righteous are the faults of *those brought near*" is a saying attributed to al-Kharrāz in *Kashf al-khafā'*. "Those brought near"(*al-muqarrabūn*) is a Qur'anic term which may refer to angels [4:172] or those human beings nearest to God [56:11].

[149] See footnote 125.

Mercy for Himself...[6:54], ... *He it is Who accepts repentance from His servants* [42:25], and many other like verses. *Peace!*

⁂

LETTER 75

Realize your true attributes and God will support you with His Attributes

FOR THOSE WHO are at the station of effacement (*al-fanā'*) رضي الله عنه, the Divine Essence is identical to the Attributes, for when they are effaced to themselves, they cease to perceive anything besides the Essence, and when they perceive It, they cease to perceive anything else. For this reason are they called "*al-dhātiyyūn*" ("those of the essence"). The Divine Essence has such perfection, goodness, and beauty that It bewilders the minds of the saints, not to mention the generality, for It becomes so subtle and so fine that it vanishes, and when it vanishes It says to Itself, 'My perfection, My beauty, My goodness, My splendor, My nobility, My sublimity, and My Exaltation are infinite, without limit, but they have vanished and are not apparent, and Perfection is not perfection unless it is as Present as it is Absent, unless It is both Subtle and Dense, Near and Far, Beautiful and Majestic.' Thus, It wished to be manifested and so It said (even as It knows), 'How may I manifest it?' and then It said, 'I shall become dense and differentiated.' This it did, and behold it was essences, or we could say forms, both present and absent, subtle and dense, exalted and lowly, near and far, spiritual and sensory, beautiful and rigorous, and all of Its Essence—or if you prefer, its forms—has manifested its beauty within, but the Essence, Itself, is not apparent in Itself, for there is no It except It, and there is nothing else there apart from It. As the spiritual masters of the Way in the East have said:

> All that is beauty is the beauty of God.
> Of this, there is no doubt
> Except to one whose intellect is veiled
> and overcome by doubt

> O you who drink at the spring,
> with realization doubt disappears:
> The Essence is the spring of the Attributes
> And in this there is no doubt.

And there are other like sayings that express the same meaning from the masters of the Way in the east and west. So if you understand our spiritual allusions, *O faqīr*, then may God bless you, and if not, then may you realize your attribute and may your Lord help you with His Attribute.[150]

Know, may God be merciful to you, that Majesty is essence and Beauty is attribute, and the Essence is the source of the Qualities. All those who have reached the station of effacement know this, as we have said, but not others such as the respected scholars of outward formal knowledge ﵃. There is no doubt that the Outward is pure rigor and the inward pure beauty, except that the outward gives something of its rigor to the inward and the inward gives something of its beauty to the outward, so that the outward becomes rigor with beauty and the inward becomes beauty with rigor. The outward rigor, however, is essential and the beauty contingent, just as the inward beauty is essential and the rigor contingent.

This is something no one knows except someone who has studied deeply the knowledge of the folk as we have, and immersed himself in it as we have, and then become effaced from himself in it as we have—may God be pleased with us.

And hear, O *faqīr*, what the great shaykh and saint, Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Anṣārī al-Sāḥilī[b] said in his book *Bughīyat al-Sālik fī ashrafi al-masālik*:

"Know, may God illuminate our hearts with the lights of gnosis and carry us along the way of every gnostic saint, that gnosis is the goal of the station of excellence (*al-iḥsān*) and its highest degree. God Most High said: *And they did not measure God with His true measure* [22:74], which means, 'they have not known Him with true gnosis', and also, *You see their eyes overflow with tears because of what they know of the Truth* [5:83]. And the Prophet ﷺ said, 'The support of the house is its foundation and the support of religion is Divine knowledge.'[151] But what we mean here by gnosis is stability in the state of contemplation, accompanied by justice and wisdom. This is different from the meaning the jurists give to this term, namely that gnosis means knowledge of practices and beliefs. Even if gnosis is broad enough to include formal knowledge (*al-ᶜilm*) as such, yet it has a more specific application: the personal knowledge of God Most High through the meanings of His Names and Attributes, without separating the Attributes and Essence. This is the knowledge which flows forth from the spring of union, expresses a complete and total purity, and articulates what it means for the soul to be perpetually with God. And if today nothing remains of this except simply a name without there being what is named, still we need to make abundant mention of its states and conditions so that you may at least know the value of what has been lost to us with God, and be able to see what 'the solitary ones'[152] went ahead of us to find, what the gnostics gained, and what those who fell short, those who sought only outward knowledge, failed to reach. *Truly we are God's, and unto Him we return* [2:155]." *Peace.*

---

[150] Here he is echoing the *Ḥikam* 178: "Realize your attributes and He will help you with His Attributes."

LETTER 76

Visiting the masters of the Ṭarīqa; recognizing the shaykh

LISTEN, O *faqīr*: I would like anyone who follows me to maintain the obligatory worship and what is confirmed of the *sunna* and to visit [the resting places of] the masters of the Ṭarīqa such as al-Ghazālī, buried in Jarīdat al-Andalūs,[153] Sīdī Ibn al-ᶜArabī al-Maᶜāfirī, Sīdī Ḥirzihim, Sīdī ᶜAbdallāh al-Tāwudī, our master, Sīdī ᶜAlī al-Jamal and his masters of the family of Ibn ᶜAbdallāh, and the masters of these latter from among the Fāsis. All of those are in the city of Fes, may God defend it from all harm. [He should also visit] Sīdī Abū Yaᶜzā al-Maghrebī in Tāghya, Abū Madyan al-Ghawth in Tlemcen, Mūlay ᶜAbd al-Salām ibn Mashīsh[b] on Jabal al-Aᶜlām,and others like them from the people of Maghreb and elsewhere. There are many of them ؓ but no one knows them except the one who has reached their station or stood in their footprints and has been guided by them, for the footprints are evidence of the ones who left them,[154] and no one understands this except someone of subtle intellect who is endowed with knowledge and piety ؓ.

---

[151] We were not able to find a source for this saying.

[152] This refers to the well-known *ḥadīth* found in collections of Muslim, Tirmidhī, Aḥmad and many others which states that when some of the Companions were travelling with the Prophet ﷺ and they reached a mountain called Jumdān, he said to them, "Travel on, for the solitary ones have gone ahead." When they asked, "Who are 'the solitary ones'?" he replied, "Men and women who remember God much," or in another version, "Those who are madly in love with the remembrance of God."

[153] This al-Ghazālī should not be confused with ᶜAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Ghazālī.

No doubt, the generality take the people of their time as masters and then abandon themselves to their instincts, that is, to the pursuit of their desires. They believe that their shaykhs are masters of the Ṭarīqa but they are not. They do not really know them nor see that they are simply part of the generality of decent, pious folk. Most of them place the station [of these masters] higher than they really are. In fact, they make them spiritual poles (*aqṭāb*) and do not accept that the *quṭb*[155]could be anyone else. Say to them what you will; you will only weary yourself with words.

But the matter is not as they believe—quite the opposite, in fact. Gold is only recognized by people who work with gold, like the belt-makers.[156] Other people might come across it lying on the ground and not even pick it up or recognize it because they take it for copper, brass, or pewter. Or else they might come across some copper, brass, or pewter on the ground, take for gold, esteem it, and make it into their most prized precious possession, may God be kind to them. Such is their state most of the time. And yet how different is one thing from the other.

---

[154] In this phrase, the Shaykh uses "their station" (*maqāmihim*) and "their footprints" (*athārihim*) in a double sense. *Maqām* can be understood to mean "spiritual station" and also "the place of their tomb," and *athār* can mean both "their footprints," and so, "their path," as well as the monument built to commemorate them.

[155] The *quṭb* (pl. *aqṭāb*), literally "axis" or "pole" is a term applied to the greatest spiritual master in a given time or place.

[156] *Al-samāyṭiyya* is the Moroccan craft of making belts embroidered with gold, such as those worn by brides.

The masters of the Ṭarīqa, as I have mentioned in my teachings, are almost like prophets (God's blessings and salutations of peace be upon them), for they inherit from them their qualities and their traits. Outwardly they are human beings, inwardly they are lordly, outwardly methodic, inwardly attracted, outwardly sober, inwardly intoxicated, outwardly separation, inwardly union, and so forth. So how can their attributes be compared to the attributes [of the generality]? There is a vast distance between the two attributes, or I might say the two directions. So do not attribute to one of the shaykhs ؓ a quality other than what God has attributed to him. In fact, do not attribute to him anything at all except what God has attributed to him. If he is among the scholars of outward knowledge, then call him that, and if he is among the scholars of inward knowledge, then call him that. Or we could say, if he is among the people of evidence and proof, call him that, and if he is among the people of contemplation and vision, call him that. But do not say about a jurist (*faqīh*) that he is a knight (*fāris*) or about a knight that he is a jurist, nor say about someone who is a leader what is not befitting a leader, or vice versa, as so many ignorant students might do in their writings.

No doubt, in visiting the [tombs] of the masters ؓ there is great merit and a spiritual mystery, as the illustrious master, Sīdī Ibrāhīm al-Tāzī, who is buried in Ouhrān[b], said ؓ:

> A visit to the pious saints is a passage that cures
> and a key to the doors of guidance and good,"

... to the end of his precious *qaṣīda*.[157]

O *faqīr*, I strongly recommend to you and to all who follow me—if you can—to make these visits regularly, as if you were visiting family, as long as you live. I also urge you to do what lowers the place of your ego, which is among the conditions of the Way, not to affirm what elevates it, as most people do these days apart from rare exceptions—and a judgment is not based on exceptions. *Peace!*

---

[157] This poem is quoted at length in letter 172.

LETTER 77

Opposing the ego and its desires

BEWARE OF LETTING your heart incline towards your ego, for this would be a kind of hypocrisy. This inclination means that it seeks out what is easiest for it to bear, as is the way of the folk ؓ, what is heaviest.

Always choose what is heaviest (on the ego), not what is lightest, until the ego is effaced. As we have said many times: opposing the desires will result in God-given knowledge, God-given knowledge will result in greater certitude, and greater certitude will erase doubts and illusions and plunge the one who possesses it into the presence of the True Sovereign and Knower. *Peace!*

LETTER 78

The livelihood of the *faqīr*

FOR THE GENERALITY of the faithful, there is capital and profit, but for the people of the Way I believe there is only profit. Anyone who would be among them should refrain from hoarding wealth and possessions. On the contrary, he should be always generous and open-handed, for such is the nature of their Guardian Lord Who said, *Nay, but His two Hands are outstretched, He bestows as He wills* [5:64]. The Hand of God is full and it is beyond any fear of loss, as the noble *ḥadīth* states.[158] Only those who have grown remote from their Lord are prone to fear poverty, but as for those who have been granted profit without capital, how could they fear loss? God forbid that we should think for a moment that a person who has God as his Lord and Muḥammad ﷺ as his Prophet could truly be without capital! As the saint Abū'l-ᶜAbbās al-Mursī ؓ[b] said, "People have their livelihoods, and our livelihood is God," and another time, "People have their livelihoods and our livelihood is faith and devotion, even as God Most High has said, *Had the*

---

[158] "The Hand of God is full and not diminished by spending both night and day." Bukhārī, *Tafsīr* of [11:7] ...*while His Throne was upon the water.*

people of the towns believed and been reverent, We would surely have opened unto them blessings from Heaven and earth[7:96]."[159]

One day I was speaking about this with one of the *fuqarā'* from among our brothers from Fes and he said that the people who work for a living are superior to those who have left the workaday world, citing as proof the *ḥadīth*, "Verily God loves the servant who exercises a profession."[160] I said to him, "Yes, God loves the servant who exercises a profession, but the greatest profession is to leave all professions. God Most High says, *And whosoever reverences God, He will appoint a way out for him and will provide for him whence he reckons not. And whosoever trusts in God, He suffices him* [65:2,3]. He did not know, may God be kind to him, that of those who seek their means of livelihood the best is the one who has attained such complete trust in God that he may descend into the workaday world after having reached freedom. This was how our teacher ؓ was, who, despite his majesty and high station, used to go from shop to shop collecting (old) paper, or like Abū Salhām,[b] who would only go to the edge of the sea and gesture towards it and fish would come to him without effort. His sublime station and place with God was veiled by the frailest of means: fishing with a line. *Peace!*

⁂

LETTER 79

A true *sharīf* is noble in character

LISTEN, O *faqīr*, to what I said to one of the *shurafā'*[161] who had ill-treated someone: "Anyone who claims to be a *sharīf* but who lacks virtue is a liar. A true *sharīf* is someone with noble character. How could he be otherwise when his ancestor is the Messenger of God ﷺ, about whom God says, *Truly you are of an exalted character* [68:4]. So if your attribute is not from his, and your trait is not from his, in what sense are you from him? From what door are you near him? For the Messenger of God ﷺ, there was only noble character and virtue. He had nothing else but this, and God is a warrant to what I say. The great saint and master al-Buṣīrī[b] says in his *Burda*:

---

[159] *Laṭā'if al-minan*, *op. cit.* (Chapter 4, p. 111).

[160] Ṭabarānī, in both *al-Awsaṭ* and *Kabīr*, Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab al-Īmān*, Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, Ḥakīm, *al-Mustadrak*, and other sources with slight variations in wording.

[161] See footnote 2.

> Abandon what the Christians have claimed about their Prophet,
> Beyond that you may say whatever you wish in praise of him,
>
> You may ascribe whatever you wish of nobility to his essence,
> And to his rank, whatever you wish of greatness.
>
> Indeed, the high merit of the Messenger of Allah has no furthest limit
> Which could be expressed by the tongue of a human being...
>
> The extent of the knowledge we have of him is that he is a man,
> And that he is the best of all Allah's creation.[162]

I also said to one of the *fuqarā'* who had become known among the people of his area as *al-Murābiṭ*,[163] "My dear brother, you are known as *al-Murābiṭ* more than all the rest of the *fuqarā'*, so you should also be known for virtue more than all the rest of them so that you fit your name! *Peace!*

⁂

LETTER 80

Weaning the ego

BEWARE, O *faqīr*, of letting your ego push you towards doing what your Lord has prohibited for you and abandoning what He has enjoined upon you. Beware of that, be satisfied with your portion of this world, continually wean your soul away from it, and do not think that what we ask is impossible. It is actually very much within your grasp. Only illusion makes it appear difficult, and illusion is false, so pay it no heed. Do not think that weaning your soul from its appetites and desires—the first of them and the last of them—is something so difficult nor see it as so dependent on certain things that parting from them is unimaginable, for parting from them is actually an easy thing:

---

[162] *The Burda*, *op. cit.*, lines 43-45 and 51.

[163] A term that used to be applied to a saint in Moroccan, referring back to the Murābiṭūn dynasty (Almoravids), who ruled the land from 1040 to 1147 and established the Mālikī rite.

The self is like an infant, if you neglect its proper care,
It will grow still loving to suckle;
But once you wean it, it will be weaned,[164]

… as the Shaykh al-Buṣīrī ؓ[b] said in his *Burda*, and as has proven true time and time again. And I am not saying that I was unable to abandon certain things and then suddenly I was free of them and had forgotten about them. But if I decided not to eat, not to sleep, not to speak, and not to mix with people, I could do so without hardship or fatigue. And God is a warrant for what we say. *Peace!*

LETTER 81

Caution against being deluded by exoteric knowledge and its scholars

BE CAREFUL, O Sīdī Aḥmad Akaᶜrīr al-Zayyātī, of continuing to pursue exoteric knowledge and caution the great scholar Sīdī Aḥmad ibn ᶜAjība al-Manjarī ؓ[b] against this as well. As the saint and eminent master Abū Ḥafs Sīdī ibn ᶜUmar ibn al-Fāriḍ[b] says in his *Tā'iya* ؓ:

Be not one of those whom studies make a fool
By diminishing his intellect and taking its place.
There beyond the texts is a knowledge so fine
that the soundest reasons cannot reach it.
I received it from my soul and took it to myself
And by this gift was my soul sustained.

And as al-Majdhūb[b] ؓ said:

If it is knowledge on pages (*awrāq*),
Then it is limited to the sweetness of its expression,
But if it is knowledge from tastes (*adhwāq*),
then I can see it dwelling in the depths of my soul.

And Shaykh al-Shādhilī ؓ[b] said, "He who does not immerse himself in this knowledge of ours dies with major sins of which he is unaware."

---

[164] *The Burda*, *op. cit.*, line 18.

And Shaykh Ibrāhīm ibn Adham ﵁[b] said, "If I knew of a knowledge nobler than this under the vast expanse of the sky, I would rush to find it." And Shaykh al-Mursī ﵁[b] said, "When you see someone who has been given varied sorts of knowledge, and to whom a storehouse of understanding has been opened, do not dispute with him using words upon a page, nor the jealousy of egos, for what is granted by God is higher than what is acquired." And it was said to Shaykh Abū'l-Ḥasan ᶜAlī ibn Maymūn ﵁ at the beginning of his way, "Throw away your books and dig down into the earth of your soul so that your own spring might flow forth. Otherwise, depart from me."

And the illustrious shaykh, my teacher Sīdī Abū'l-Ḥasan ᶜAlī al-Jamal ﵁,[b] said, "Books that issue from the heart!—those are the ones you should spend your money on from the beginning of the world to its end, for they are the source."

And the shaykh al-Shādhilī ﵁[b] said when he met his Shaykh, the Pole, Mūlay ᶜAbd al-Salām ibn Mashīsh ﵁,[b] "O God, I am washing myself clean of my knowledge and my deeds so that I will have neither knowledge nor deed except what will come to me by the hand of this master," and then he washed in the spring nearby known as Ḥisn at the base of the mountain on the *qibla* side, may God ennoble it, and this became a practice for all those who would visit thereafter, since there is no way to attain the knowledge of the Truth except [by giving up any claims to having knowledge]. This is the reason I mention here what I know of the words of these masters ﵃.

The illustrious shaykh Mūlay ᶜAbd al-Q̲ādir al-Jīlānī ﵁,[b] said in his Q̲aṣīda in ᶜ*ayn*:

> If destiny aids you or God's decree takes you
> To a living shaykh adept in the Truth,
> Then do what he approves and follow what he wishes
> And set aside all that you had done before.
> Be with him like the dead in the hands of the washer
> Whom he turns how he wants and it complies.
> Do not oppose him about what you do not know
> Concerning him, for in opposition there is struggle.
> But accept of him what you see of him

> Even if it appears unlawful, for that may be deceiving,
> As shown by the story of Khidr and the slain youth
> And Moses' protesting what he did not understand. [165]

... to his words, "Such is the knowledge of the folk: in it there are marvels."

But beware, O Sīdī Aḥmad, that you do not take from what we are saying the suggestion that outward knowledge should be abandoned out of love for the people of the inward path. By God, no, and again, no! I completely recognize that there is no path to spiritual realization except through the door of the Law, and no path to [inward] freedom except through the door of servanthood. What I have quoted from the masters رضي الله عنهم concerning this is only because I see that there are some scholars of outward knowledge رضي الله عنهم who view the people of the Way—the people of inward knowledge—in a worse light than they do the sinful, and who are quicker to condemn them than they are to condemn transgressors of the Law. Those scholars—may God be kind to them—claim they are right in occupying themselves with the knowledge that is indispensable for the worship of our Lord, but it is almost as if God Most High had not also commanded them to oppose their appetites and desires. And this is great ignorance and clear error on their part. We believe that they should repent from what they have been doing, resolutely and without hesitation, lest they lead themselves to their own ruin and to the ruin of the generality of uneducated people who follow them. Even if they themselves [appear] to have shut the door of repentance in their own faces and in the faces of those who follow them, that door is always open and will remain open until the sun rises in west—*On the day that one of the signs of your Lord does come,* [6:158]—among which is the rising of the sun in the west, and God knows best.[166] It is astonishing how strict they are with people,[167] how many they drive away from God, how difficult they make things, how narrow they make the path, and how many they lead to ruin![168]

---

[165] For al-Khiḍr, see footnote 137. Among the experiences by which he teaches Moses (God's blessings and salutations of peace be upon them) is the slaying of a youth who is apparently innocent. Later he explains to Moses عليه السلام that the youth was someone bringing grief to his parents. In fact, according to Deuteronomy 21:18-21, that is a sin punishable by death.

Despite this, people of sincerity continue to turn in repentance, continue to profit, continue to journey, and continue to arrive. O you who cannot distinguish between what is wrong and what is right: the door of generosity—that is the door!

How amazing, too, that those who arrive, in their nearness to God, are not strict with others, nor do they make things narrow, while the ones who are cut off, in their distance from God, are. My teacher ؓ always used to tell me, "We have nothing but God's grace and the grace of those scholars of outward knowledge who hold on to the landmarks (*aʿlām*) of the Prophet ﷺ[169] for us so that if one of us should be drowning in the sea of the Supreme Reality, he may see the landmark to return to and be rescued." And he also used to repeat to me the perfect expression of the people who combine the Law and the Truth: "He who follows the Law outwardly but does not realize the Truth inwardly is corrupt; he who realizes the Truth inwardly but does not follow the Law outwardly is heretical; and he who combines them both has realized what is right."[170] He would also often say to us, "There are folk who are veiled by the Law from the Truth and there are folk who are veiled by the Truth from the Law, and there are folk who make the Law a door and the Truth a return. *They are the party of God. Truly the party of God—it is they who shall prosper* [58:22]."

---

[166] According to a *ḥadith* in Muslim, *al-Fitan*, and other primary sources, "The Hour will not arise until you see ten signs before it ...." Then the Prophet ﷺ goes on to mention the Smoke, the *Dajjāl* (anti-Christ), the Beast, the rising of the sun in the west, the descent of Jesus, son of Mary, the emergence of Gog and Magog, three places where the earth swallows up those upon it—one in the east, one in the west, and one in the Arabian peninsula—and finally a fire that will emerge from Yemen and drive people to the Gathering.

[167] The word here appears as *shaddadū*, "to be strict and severe," in some printings and *sharradū*, "to chase or frighten someone away," in the lithographed version.

[168] As we mentioned in the introduction, the Shaykh was writing at a time when Wahhabī teachings first appeared in Arabia and were making inroads into other Muslim lands, including Morocco.

[169] By which he means the forms of the revealed law, principally acts of formal devotion such as prayer and fasting which reaffirm that "the servant is the servant and the Lord is the Lord."

[170] This is a saying generally attributed to Imam Mālik.

Dear Sīdī Aḥmad, we received the Ṭarīqa from its masters, from Sīdī Abū'l-Ḥasan ᶜAlī al-Jamal ﵁ and he received it from a noble man. This man was advanced in years, had a goodly face, was immaculate in appearance, sublime in aspiration, and generous in nature. He came from the east and his name was ᶜAbdallāh. [My master] found him in the city of Tetouan, may God protect it, staying with certain people in a house which he did not leave nor others enter and no one knew who he was. [My master] said to me, "But I have never seen generosity and nobility as great as his ﵁ for his nature reflected the Name of God Most High 'The Infinitely Generous One (*al-Karīm*).' He told me, "The way I met him was by the blessing of a visit to Mūlay ᶜAbd al-Salām ibn Mashīsh,[b] may God benefit us through him." I heard from him that he remained with him in Tetouan for two years.

He also told me that he had met Shaykh Sīdī al-ᶜArabī ibn ᶜAbdallāh al-Fāsī[b] in the Makhfiyya quarter [of Fes] and that he had met him before he met the *sharīf* I have just mentioned, but at that time [Sīdī al-ᶜArabī] had not imparted to him anything, for his nature was then reflecting the Name of God Most High, The Withholder (*al-Mānīᶜ*). For this reason, he continued to search for what he needed until he found the *sharīf* I have mentioned, and God gave him illumination through him. When this *sharīf* died, [Sīdī ᶜAlī] returned to Fes illuminated, as we have said, and it was then that he became the disciple of Sīdī al-ᶜArabī ibn ᶜAbdallāh for sixteen years. During this time, he saw nearly countless spiritual mysteries and I never heard him speak of [his shaykh] without weeping—may God be a warrant for what we say. Sīdī al-ᶜArabī ibn ᶜAbdallāh was aged and practiced extreme anonymity (*khāmil al-dhikr*) such that no one knew him nor did anyone accord him any particular merit, for he tended toward an [outward] state of self-neglect, and such a state repels people. He was also extremely silent.

He himself had taken the Ṭarīqa from his father, Sīdī Abū'l-ᶜAbbās ibn ᶜAbdallāh, who was well-known among all the people of North

Africa, and he from Sīdī Qāsim al-Khaṣāṣī رضي الله عنه,[b] whose advice to one of his brothers in God was this: "Do not occupy yourself at all with anyone who insults or harms you, but rather occupy yourself with God and He will repel him from you just as He was the One Who moved him against you in order to test your sincerity. Many people err in this respect and busy themselves with those who hurt them, but the hurt remains along with the sin. If they had returned to God, He would have repelled their foes from them and sufficed them in their affair." When he died, he was succeeded by the pole of the circle, Sīdī Abū'l-ᶜAbbās al-Yamānī رضي الله عنه,[b] who was a *sharīf* of the Qādirī order, but God knows best. His son Sīdī al-ᶜArabī, who was the shaykh of our shaykh, received the Ṭarīqa from him. When our shaykh received the Ṭarīqa from him, he was still a youth. We have already mentioned the spiritual lineage [beyond this], and may God benefit us by them all.

I also heard my shaykh say many times, "They say that from the border of Tunis to the border of Wādi Nūn[171] there are only two people adept in this art. They say that the pretenders are many, the sincere, few, even as the Book of God says, *Yet how few are they!* [38:24].

You have said to me, O Sīdī Aḥmad Akaᶜrīr, that the noble and godly scholar, Sīdī Aḥmad ibn ᶜAjība رضي الله عنه, had met a number of saints of the inward in the city of Fes (may God protect it). I find what you said to be very unlikely, even strange, since I was there [during that time] and there was no one as you describe except for our teacher رضي الله عنه and at present there is no one left there except pretenders and some of our brothers who had been among the shaykh's companions رضي الله عنهم. It is surely a strange thing and is even as the illustrious master, Sīdī Abū Madyan,[b] said:

When shall I see [the true folk of God]—
how shall I catch a glimpse of them,
or my ear hear news of them? [172]

No doubt, if the states of the saints رضي الله عنهم are for the most part lowly, and if people are looking only for what is elevated, how can they recognize them? How far they remain from the saints unless God takes them by the hand. Or as the master and saint Sīdī Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh says in his *Ḥikam* [156], "Glory be to Him Who has not made any sign leading to His saints save as a sign leading to Himself, and who has joined no one to them except him whom God wants to join to Himself." And if you were to ask me, "How were you able to come to know them and to receive [guidance] from them?" I would say that I was looking for the state of lowliness, not for the state of elevation, and there is where I found what I sought, may praise and thanks be to God.

---

[171] Wādī Nūn is an area near the town Guelmim in the Moroccan Sahara. The distance the Shaykh describes is about 1900 miles.

[172] Cornell, *op. cit.* p. 164, with slight modifications.

So many people look towards nothing but this world and to whom it belongs and do not look towards poverty nor towards the one who is poor for God. There are even some who, if they saw a poor saint, would flee from him and never approach him, and would say [to themselves], "If he were a saint, he would be rich, not poor. If he cannot do better for himself, how can he do better for people?" They do not understand that a saint is poor in respect to this world but rich in God, the One Who gives him sufficiency.

Concerning the supererogatory practices[173] you told me about, I knew them when I was a youth, but weakness and laziness overcame me, so ask God to grant me His accord, and may He suffice you. [But I would like to pass on to you] that my master ؓ spoke to me of a practice that very few people undertake, even while [all other practice] is based upon it, and that is to realize our true attribute, even as Sīdī Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh said in his *Ḥikam* [125]: "Cling to the Attributes of His Lordship and realize the attributes of your servanthood." And the folk say, "The deeper you bury your ego, earth upon earth, the higher your heart will rise, heaven upon heaven."

O Sīdī Aḥmad, one of the *fuqahā'* of Fes said to me something similar to what you have, and I answered him with many responses, some of which I mention to you not in a sense of confrontation, but out of love for you. One of these was the saying of one of the Companions ؓ, "I have followed all the practices and have never seen one more effective in respect to the Next World than the path of renunciation of this world."[174] In fact, we have experienced something of this, and that is why we have lightened up concerning [the supererogatory worship] you mentioned, as you see."

---

[173] *Al-rawātib*, "the ordered ones," are usually understood to be the supererogatory prayers offered regularly before and after the obligatory worship.

Also, whenever energy is put into outward practice, there will not be any for inward practice, for strength does not come from both directions, as we and others have said many times. I said to him, O Sīdī Aḥmad, "Our supererogatory worship is known only to people who have had a true taste, and it is to distance oneself from people and draw nearer to God, the Truth. 'What you dislike in me is exactly what my heart craves,' as they say. The number of people in the Way who follow this [now] has become exceedingly small and only some of the stronger of the saints ﵁ of the past followed it, people such as the imminent shaykh Abū Ḥafṣ Sīdī ᶜUmar ibn al-Fāriḍ ﵁[b] who said,

> Take hold of the robes of love and cast off all reserve
> and leave the way of the ascetics no matter how great.[175]

Or as the great Shaykh Sīdī ᶜAlī al-Shushtarī ﵁[b] said:

> I want to go naked—the greatest thing!—
> As went the two hearts of Ghaylān and Mayy.[176]

The master Sīdī ᶜIzz al-Dīn ibn ᶜAbd al-Salām[b] used to say in denial of the Way of the folk, 'Is there any path other than what we have understood from the Book and *sunna*?' But after he met al-Shādhilī[b] and had received the Ṭarīqa from him, he would say, 'By God, the Sufis are the only ones whose way is based on the immutable principles of the Law." Imam al-Ghazālī ﵁[b] said similar things before he met his shaykh, al-Bāzghānī.[b]'

And I said to him, O Sīdī Aḥmad, "A great number of the saints followed the inward path and no one turned them back from it, whether he was a person of importance or not. God Most High has said, *So if they do not believe in them, We have entrusted them to a people who will not disbelieve in them* [6:89]. This is exactly the situation. The outward and inward are opposites, and opposites do not combine except in those walking in the footsteps of the Messenger of God ﷺ, people such as Imam Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, Imam ᶜUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, Imam ᶜUthmān ibn ᶜAffān, Imam ᶜAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (may God ennoble his countenance),[b] his two sons, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, may God be pleased with them all, or people like the great saints, Sīdī al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Dhū'l-Nūn al-Miṣrī, Ibrāhīm ibn Adham, Sufyān al-Thawrī, Sīdī Maᶜrūf al-Karkhī, Sīdī Abū Yazīd al-Basṭāmī,[b] and others like them from among the masters of the East and West. They are many, but no one really knows them except the one who has arrived at their station or stood in their footprints and was guided by them.

---

[174] This saying, cited in Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab al-Īmān*, is attributed to Abū Wāqid al-Laythī ﵁ with the wording, "We have followed different practices but found none of them as effective in seeking the Next World than the way of renunciation in this world."

[175] Dīwān, Qaṣīda: *Huwa al-ḥubb* (He is love), p. 163

[176] Ghaylan ibn ᶜUqba ibn Nahīs and Mayy bint ᶜĀsim ibnṬalba ibn Qays are lovers mentioned in early Islamic Arabic poetry, similar to Majnūn and Layla.

As for the others, they are only people of outward knowledge, without inward knowledge, or people of inward knowledge without the outward, or else without either. Opposites do not meet except in someone who is following in the footsteps of the Messenger of God ﷺ as we have said, and this is something extremely difficult. Thus has it been recorded that there is one of the angels (God's blessings and salutations of peace be upon them) who perpetually glorifies God Most High with the words, "Glory be to the One Who joins fire and ice."[177]

This is why the great shaykh, Sīdī Abū'l-ᶜAbbās Aḥmad al-Yamānī,[b] the Fasī shaykhs who followed him, and our teachers from among the ᶜAbdallawiyyin رضي الله عنهم have all disagreed with Shaykh al-Ḥasan al-Yūsī[b] when he said, "(O God), beautify us outwardly by ascetic effort and rectify us inwardly by contemplation," saying "There cannot be strength in both dimensions. Whenever the outward becomes stronger through ascetic effort, the inward grows weaker in contemplation, and vice versa." And one of the masters said, "If you see someone paying a lot of attention to the outward aspect, know that inwardly he is in ruins." Few indeed are they who can combine the outward and the inward, the Law and the Truth, sobriety and intoxication, separation and union, and so forth. I have said this often, so there is no need to say any more about it here.

---

[177] This is similar to a *ḥadīth* quoted in al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā ᶜulūm al-dīn*, Book 15: "God has an angel who is half fire, half ice, who says, "O God, as You have brought together fire and ice, bring together the hearts of Your righteous servants." Something similar is also mentioned in the *Tafsīr* of al-Qurṭubī on Q.17:01, *Glory be to the One Who took His servant for a journey by night...*

Concerning the vision that appeared to the *sharīf*, Sīdī Abū'l-ᶜAbbās Aḥmad ibn ᶜAjība al-Manjarī,[b] it is marvelous (*ᶜajīb*) just like his name (*ᶜajība*), and God knows best. Rejoice, O Sīdī Aḥmad, in what your Prophet ﷺ gave you when you saw him in a dream and know that there will come to you gifts by the grace of the God, just as your vision came to you by the grace of God. I too saw him ﷺ in a dream before I was with you in the city of Fes at the time when [the Muslims] retook al-Burayja, which the great and noble Sultan, Sīdī Abū ᶜAbdallāh Muḥammad ibn ᶜAbdallāh ibn Ismāᶜīl al-Ḥasanī al-ᶜAlawī,[b] entered it in 1186 AH.[178] [I saw the Prophet ﷺ in my dream] and wanted to rise up from where I was sleeping, but he motioned to me two or three times with his noble hand to remain where I was. After I met my teacher, I recounted this dream to him and he said, "He has granted you security." Then, by God, I saw exactly what that security was with my own eyes [in the waking state], may praise and thanks be to God.

After that vision, I had another of our lady Fāṭima al-Zahrā',[b] may God be pleased with her, and thanks to this vision, my heart abandoned its ordinary habits and all its desires, and refused to return to them. From that time, all has been well with us, may praise and thanks be to God. Such is the mystery of a true vision.

My teacher ؓ was often immersed in a vision of the Prophet ﷺ, both in the waking state and in dreams, and it seems to me—and God knows best—that his visions and discourse with him ﷺ were more powerful than Sīdī al-Mursī's. I was with him over a period of many years and also saw his description of the Prophet ﷺ in the experiences he recorded, and between him and Sīdī al-Mursī there is a big difference. If you wish to know what I mean, see what Sīdī Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh recorded concerning this in his book *Laṭā'if al-minan* and what my teacher wrote in his book, and you will see that there is a difference in the power of their visions of the Prophet ﷺ.[179]

---

[178] Al-Burayja, literally, "the little fortress," is the original name for present day coastal town of al-Jadīda, about 70 miles southwest of Casablanca. Under the name Mazagan, it was the last possession of the Portuguese in Morocco before they were driven out by the forces of Sīdī Muḥammad ibn ᶜAbdallāh al-ᶜAlawī in 1772, as the Shaykh mentions. See *al-Istiqṣā li akhbār duwali'l-Maghrib al-aqṣā*, Dār al-Kitāb, Casablanca, 1997, vol. 9, p. 12.

God (be He glorified) Who is *the Possessor of Strength, the Firm* [51:58] will reckon with me if what I say concerning the power of my teacher arises from my ego. If I affirm his strength, it is because our Lord made him strong. But I am satisfied that my Lord knows this. If I were afraid to mention anything about the power of my teacher's visions because someone might say, "He says this because it is not enough for him that his Lord knows it," then that would indeed be the case. But that is not the case, and I say what I say without hesitation. After that, let people say what they want, for I am satisfied that our Lord knows all this.[180]

What also brought me to mention what I have mentioned concerning my knowledge of my master's strength is that I have seen how people are sometimes reluctant to see the virtues of those who are still alive—

---

[179] Some of Shaykh al-Mursī's sayings are quoted in letter 50, above. As for Sīdī ᶜAlī al-Jamal, the passage which the Shaykh is referring to appears in the collection of his writings entitled *Naṣīḥatu'l-murīd fī ṭarīq ahli al-sulūk wa al-tajrīd* or *al-Yawāqīt al-ḥissān fī taṣrīf maᶜnā'l-insān*, which was published in 2005 by Dar al-Kutub al-ᶜIlmiyya, Beirut. On page 306 of that edition, Sīdī ᶜAlī al-Jamal describes his relationship to the Prophet ﷺ thusly:

> "Know that among the special gifts which my Guardian Lord gave to me in His graciousness, generosity, and excellence is that whenever I recalled the Prophet ﷺ either in thought or words, I would find him with me, myself seated before him, not [just] in a spiritual sense, but in a physical sense, and he would speak to me of hidden teachings. From him I received both exoteric and esoteric teachings, with his noble Companions seated with me before him, may peace be upon him and may God be pleased with them all. This is part of what I was granted by the grace of the Infinitely Generous, may His praise abound and His Names and Attributes be sanctified...So I came to receive knowledge and practice from their source, generosity and nobility from their source, sincerity and veracity from their source, and truth, both outward and inward, from their source. It is of this that I dance, of this that I sing, and in this is that my effacement is effaced. It is my invocation, my vision, my thought. It is my drink; it is my wine."

[180] One who is "satisfied with God's knowledge," has no need to exalt either himself or his shaykh, both of which tend to arise from the ego.

even if they are among the people of greatest virtue—and only see the virtues of those in the past who are gone. A great number of people are affected by this—and we seek refuge in God from that! *Peace!*

⁂

LETTER 82

Concerning his master, Sīdī ᶜAlī al-Jamal

O *FAQĪR*! Intention is surely the true elixir. When it came to me, I went in search of the one who would take me by the hand and found him in front of me, with no distance between us, almost there in the same house—and may God be a warrant for what we say.

My master was outwardly rigor, inwardly beauty; outwardly abasement and servanthood, inwardly majesty and freedom. And how ugly is the opposite case: that is, someone who is outwardly majesty and freedom and inwardly abasement and servitude; outwardly a *sunnī* and inwardly an innovator; outwardly lawful, inwardly forbidden, outwardly lordly, inwardly demonic, and so forth? "What deprives [people of] arriving (*al-wuṣūl*) [in God's presence] is their neglect of the fundamentals (*al-uṣūl*)."[181] Assuredly, when the elect such as my master choose to outwardly abase themselves, God exalts them inwardly and outwardly so they are always happy and joyful, whereas when the generality choose to outwardly exalt themselves, God abases them both outwardly and inwardly and they live in perpetual gloom.

Our master was also content with God's knowledge of him and was not distracted either by appearances or things that are concealed. He looked only towards what was between him and his Lord and did not busy himself with the praise of the praiser or the blame of the blamer, and would often repeat these verses:

> If You are sweetness, I care not if life be bitter,
> And if You are content, I can leave people to their anger.
> If what is between You and me thrives,
> What is between me and the worlds may fall to ruin.

---

[181] This is a very old Sufi saying which some attribute to Junayd. The version in the *Risālat al-Qushayriyya* reads: "They were deprived of the arrival [in God's presence] (*wuṣul*) because they neglected the foundations (*uṣul*)." See Knysh, *op. cit.*, p. 403.

If Your love for me is true, then all else is easy,
And everything upon this earth is only earth.[182]

The tongue of his state was saying, "O God! May I be disgraced before creatures if my faults are covered before You, and not the opposite, *Truly they will avail you naught against God* [45:19]."

Hear, too, O *faqīr*, some of his sayings:[183]

> "When people are occupied with worship, be occupied with the One Who is worshipped; when they are occupied with love, be occupied with the Beloved; when they are occupied with seeking the miraculous, be occupied with the sweetness of communing with God in Prayer; when they are occupied with repeating litanies, be occupied with your generous Lord …."

He also said:

> "If you contemplated Him in everything, your contemplation would veil you from everything, and He is the One, besides Whom there is nothing else. And if you bring together the contingent and the eternal, the contingent vanishes and the eternal remains. And if the Attributes of the Beloved were to be manifested, both the veil and the veiled would be effaced, and if the lights of perception appeared, both the ascetic and what he renounces would vanish. By renouncing things, you elevate them above their actual value, and they become a veil between you and God. If you contemplated God in them, or before them, or after them, you would not be veiled by them from Him. It is your being distracted by them from God that veils you from Him. If you perceived that their existence is from Him, they would not veil you. In truth, there is nothing between the servant and the One worshipped except the servant's happiness with what he possesses and sadness for what he lacks. Nothing veils you from bliss except this blameworthy trait. Were it not for the slanderer and the spy,

---

[182] These lines are attributed to the Iraqī poet and statesman Abū Firās al-Ḥamdānī (d. 357/968). It has been said that these were composed on his deathbed and were the last lines of poetry he uttered.

[183] These sayings are in rhymed prose, similar in form to the *Kitāb al-Ḥikam*.

> your joy with the Beloved would be incomplete, and were it not for the fire and the bee sting, the delight of the comb and honey would be incomplete,"... and so forth.

He also said, ؓ,

> "Anyone who claims to have drunk the wine of the Sufis or to have understood their allusions and yet has not become detached from the world is lying. And just as paradise is forbidden to one who has not died and been reborn, so too is the paradise of gnosis forbidden to one whose ego has not died to the world, to his desire to control it and choose it, to his will and craving for it, and to everything that is other than God."

And he also said ؓ,

> "Do not say 'I' until you have reached self-effacement. Life will not come to you except after death, and suns (*shumūs*) do not rise until selves (*nufūs*) have faded away. You will not reach the goal until people no longer praise you. You will not taste the food of faith except by leaving the world. You will not attain felicity until you pass away from those who are passing away. If the veils before you were rent, you would behold the Beloved in yourself, and if illusions were taken away, you would contemplate the Eternal One always. If the distance of your ego were rolled up, you would see nothing else in existence except your Lord. And if your soul has been freed of vices, thensurely *Truth has come, and falsehood has vanished* ... [17:81].

He had many other sayings like those extraordinary benefits. *Peace!*

LETTER 83

Not being deceived by those who act like Sufis

BE NOT DECEIVED by the knowledge of someone who acts like a Sufi before having actually set out on the path, that is to say, someone who has not realized his true nature.[184] God does not accept from the Sufi any knowledge that is not founded on this realization. This is not something hidden, for people often say, "Speak only about what you know from experience." And it is written in the *Ḥikam* of Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh [183]: "Every utterance that issues forth does so with the vestment of the heart from which it emerged," and there are other similar sayings.

---

[184] That is, the nature of servanthood, *al-ʿubudiyya*. See letter 75.

⁂

LETTER 84

On removing the garments of this world

DEAR BROTHER, I do not want anyone to leave the workaday world and the garments he usually wears until he has made the firm intention to leave the state of the heedless and don the garments of the awakened, to leave the garments of the denizens of this world and don the garments of the people of the Next World, to leave the garments of the habitual and to don the garments of those who break with the habitual, to leave the garments of those who are remote from God and to don the garments of those who are near to God, to remove the garments of the dead and don the garments of the living, to remove the garments of abasement and don the garments of glory, to remove the garments of those who are poor because they are deprived of God and don the garments of those who are rich by knowing God, to remove the garments of the generality and don the garments of the elect, to remove the garments of dependents, and don the garments of men, to remove the garments of the flock and don the garments of those divine rulers. *Peace!*

⁂

LETTER 85

Avoiding worldly people

ALWAYS BEWARE OF people who have worldly purposes, for to be near them is to be far from God. Seclusion from people, if undertaken according to its pre-conditions, results in pure knowledge, pure knowledge results in pure practice, and pure practice results in a pure spiritual state, or as the saintly master Sīdī Abū ᶜAbbās Aḥmad Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh says in his *Ḥikam* [46], "Good works result in good states, and good states arise from the stations wherein abide those who have spiritual realization. "*Peace!*

LETTER 86

The vision of God

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE that our Lord سبحانه وتعالى be seen and that other than God be seen besides Him, just as it is impossible for someone to see his Lord and have bad character. *Peace!*

LETTER 87

Veneration towards God and His saints and encouragement to make Qur'anic exegesis extensive

I WOULD LIKE you to venerate the things of God because this veneration is a means by which you will profit. Any of those who have received particular gifts, blessings, and the state of the elect by way of the saints have done so through their veneration for those saints. Without that, they would have attained nothing.

It was good of you, my dear brother, to write down our words—may God reward you with goodness for it:

> Knowledge is the game we hunt
> and writing the tie by which we bind it;
> Bind your game with a rope you can trust.[185]

As for your saying that the tongue and the pen are with you but you do not know whether the heart is, test yourself at a time of loss, a time when people blame you, when you have lost what you desired, and if your breast is expansive and you are joyful at that moment, then no doubt the heart is with you. In this we are bearing witness to God's words, *What of one whose breast God has expanded for submission, such that he follows a light from his Lord? Woe unto those whose hearts are hardened to the remembrance of God!* [39:22]. We consider this is a great and fitting witness, for in the elevated form of Islam which the Sufis follow, sometimes called *Ibrahīmī*, their hearts are the same both in ease and in hardship, in health and in sickness, in well-being and trial, in wealth and need, in exaltation and abasement, in expansiveness and narrowness, and so forth. This is named after our master Abraham ﷺ because he found his heart in extreme constriction—or we could say, in trial and tribulation. O God, place us and all who are attached to us on his way, by the honor of the best of creation, our master, our beloved, our guardian Muḥammad ﷺ.

---

[185] See footnote 9 concerning the verb *qayyada*.

Also, my dear brother, be careful that the commentary you make on any verse of the Qur'ān is not too short.[186] Rather, go to the utmost in explaining it and you will be right; otherwise, you will surely err. Because the Qur'ān is vast, the explanation of what is vast can only be vast itself, including that of which *none know its interpretation save God* [3:7]. Would that some of our respected scholars of outward knowledge busied themselves with the recitation of the Qur'ān instead of its commentary in order that God might open their hearts to its inward meanings and they would become among those who combined within themselves both outward and inward knowledge, both knowledge of the Law and knowledge of the Truth, and then they would explain it the way many of the perfected ones among them have explained it—may God be pleased with them and may we benefit from their blessing. Amen!

And if you say to me, "But the Qur'ān bears witness to the Abrahamic way as well as to others," I would say, "Is the one whose breast is not expanded except by the fulfillment of his desires and his purposes equal to the one who has passed away from his desires and his mundane purposes in the contemplation of his Lord? By God, no, and again, no. Test your heart as well and ask yourself whether it receives spiritual sustenance from the Mighty Qur'ān,[187] from the sayings of the Noble Prophet ﷺ, from the masters of both outward and inward knowledge, from your brothers, and from God and His Messenger ﷺ. If you find that it does, then it is a great heart, and if not, then find someone whose heart does and do not separate yourself from him until you are like him, until your traits are his and his traits are yours.

---

[186] It is likely that this letter was written to Sīdī Ibn ᶜAbīja when he was beginning his now famous Qur'anic commentary, *al-Baḥr al-Madīd*. See bibliography for our translation of a portion of that work.

[187] *Yastamiddu min al-Qur'āni 'l-ᶜAẓīm* in this context, means to derive or receive spiritual support, sustenance, and strength from the Qur'an not only in an intellectual sense by also by its blessing. The same notion applies to the other sources he mentions.

From the one who receives spiritual sustenance from God and his Messenger ﷺ do all creatures receive sustenance: the high and the low, the absent and the present, the near and the far, the gross and the subtle.[188] When the help and support he receives is strong for him, it is strong for all creatures, and when it is weak, it is weak for all creatures, but we see that if that one is perfected [in his station], whenever the help and support is stronger from one side, he turns towards the other in order that one of them does not become too heavy.[189] Such is the situation of one who has this heart, or we could say this mighty station, until the end of this world—and God is a warrant for what we say. *Peace!*

LETTER 88

Seeking knowledge

I BELIEVE THAT knowledge is attained by way of two things. One is to be always sincere in word and deed, without change or alteration, and the second is to use a level of speech which is appropriate to the words [of a question], and only one who is mindful of God can do this: *O you who believe, be mindful of God and He will teach you* [2.282]; *O you who believe! If you reverence God, He will make for you a criterion* [8.29]. *Peace!*

LETTER 89

Finding strength in servanthood

IF YOU WISH to be ever strong, be ever weak, eat and speak little, and do not be overly familiar with people. If you wish to be ever rich, be ever needy; if you wish to be ever honored, be ever abased. If you wish to be ever exalted, be ever humble; if you wish to be ever free, be ever a servant.

---

[188] That is, all variety of creatures in this physical world including humans, animals, and plants, and also creatures of the non-physical worlds, such as angels and jinn.

[189] By the two directions, he means from God and from His Prophet ﷺ, one representing the Supreme Truth, the other the Law.

If you wish to be seen always in a way you love and are content with, then be always with what your ego does not love nor is content with. If you wish to be ever known by people for your qualities, then be ever satisfied with God's knowledge of you. And if you wish to benefit always, break from the habits of your soul always. *Peace!*

LETTER 90

A saying of Sīdī ᶜAbdallāh al-Makūdī

MAY GOD MAKE you a guide to goodness, efface our egos, and give life to our hearts. Listen to what my beloved friend Sīdī Muḥammad al-Būzīdī ؓ[b] had to say: "The ego does not die as long it keeps company with people whose egos are alive. It dies by being around people whose egos are dead."

"May God make you a citadel and may all those who are attached to you be saved, by the honor of our master, Muḥammad ﷺ." I wrote this reminder to our brother in God, Sīdī Abū ᶜAbdallāh ibn ᶜAbdallāh al-Makūdī[b] in Tāza (may God protect it) for he had copied for our son Aḥmad, may God have mercy upon him, "A Guide to Goodness," (*Dalā'il al-khayrāt*) and "A Secure Citadel" (*Al-ḥisn al-ḥasīn*).[190] *Peace!*

LETTER 91

Receiving spiritual teachings; the beauty of God

BE CAREFUL NOT to desire anyone's spiritual teachings unless he truly needs to impart them to you. A sign of that is that he makes it easy for you to benefit by their support and by their divine gifts: God-given sorts of knowledge which come to hearts that have become empty of the love of this world and pure of every malicious trait.

---

[190] *Dalā'il al-khayrāt* is the title of the famous collection of blessings upon the Prophet ﷺ by Imam Sulaymān al-Jazūlī (d. 870/1465) and *al-Ḥisn al-ḥasīn* is a collection of prayers of the Prophet ﷺ by Ibn al-Jazarī (d. 833/1429). At a time when all books in Morocco were hand-copied, a book was a precious gift, and small celebrations—"birthday parties"—were held upon the completion of a copy of works such as those mentioned above.

Also, be satisfied with your Lord , and only the one who truly knows his Lord can be satisfied with Him. If you know your Lord through direct perception, it is impossible for you to turn away from Him, even if it be towards the Gardens of Paradise.[191] Anyone who claims that he knows his Lord—or we might even say, that he has seen his Lord—and has then turned away to something other than Him, be it great or lowly, is a liar. How could someone have seen the One of Whom the Qur'ān says, *Naught is like unto Him …* [42:11], and then not have passed away from everything else? What beauty can compare to God's beauty? What other thing could he long for in both worlds as much as the vision of the Countenance of his Lord? And this vision cannot be achieved or even hoped for by one whose ego is not extinguished, effaced, vanished, gone, and eclipsed as we have related from our masters, and from their masters, and from all the masters of the way ؓ.[192] And understand well: our Lord is not seen by physical forms, which are themselves of an ephemeral substance, but rather through spirit, which is an eternal substance. *Peace!*

LETTER 92

Spiritual dialogue

SPIRITUAL DIALOGUE (*al-mudhākara*) is one of the most important practices of the way and no one would dispense with it unless they were ignorant of its worth. The master of our master, Sīdī al-ᶜArabī ibn ᶜAbdallāh ؓ, used to say, "Their wine is in the sacred dance (*al-ḥaḍra*) and our wine is in talking together (*al-hadra*)." He also used to say, "Two who converse about the Way is better than carrying two loads."[193]

---

[191] That is, if someone is granted experiential knowledge of God, even the Gardens of Paradise are not as loveable and attractive, or as a Sufi put it, "My love for the Gardener is greater than my love of the garden."

[192] In letters 12 and 26.

[193] That is, the exchange is better than each one's portion of knowledge, or the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

So we do not like someone to remain silent amidst his brothers at a time of spiritual dialogue—in fact, we are very much against it. Silence at such times brings no benefit. In fact, silence reduces the benefit, because certain spiritual inspirations and insights are attracted only by means of people's speaking together, whom they may transport even into the Divine Presence. Everyone knows that a hen does not give birth to her chick except after making for her an egg. The masters of the Way are like that as well. The various sorts of knowledge they impart to the one who follows them do not come unless [the disciple] seeks them out, and "scratches" deeply [in the earth]. A question elicits an answer and an answer elicits a question, and so forth until they arrive in the Presence of God.

One day we were all involved in spiritual dialogue—this was in Fes al-Bālī (may God preserve it)—and some the brothers with us were sitting there silently, not speaking, until I finally said to them, "Either speak with us or leave!"

Our teacher, too, did not like anyone among the *fuqarā'* to sit quietly during times of spiritual exchange, and you could see it in his face how burdensome and distasteful he found it. Sometimes he would recite the words of God: *And the Word will come upon them for their having done wrong, and they shall not speak* [27:85], and he would also say, "The only one who keeps quiet during a time of spiritual dialogue is someone whose heart is like a dark room filled with beetles." The one whose heart is free of such things does not keep quiet. Rather, he expresses what is inside of him and places it into the middle of the circle, be it beautiful or ugly. But as for the one whose heart contains both what is beautiful and ugly but who is too timid to express it, such a one will not get cured of what ails him and he is cheating his own soul in the very presence of the physician.

May God cure every ailment by His infinite generosity and by the honor of the beloved Prophet, may God's blessing be upon him and his family and companions. *Peace!*

LETTER 93

The ego’s whisperings

IF YOU WISH to be rid of doubts and imaginings, then always take refuge in the *sunna* of the Prophet ﷺ. One of the most important and fundamental of these is to make sure, after urination, that you remove the last bit of urine and not to perform the ablution until you have no doubt that the flow has ceased entirely. If you want to best observe what this requires, then follow the *sunna* in respect to what is considered repletion and it will be easy for you,[194] for if you follow what innovation has come to define as being full[195] that we and so many others these days are prone to—which means to eat and drink so much that it is hard for you even to breathe in and out—then so much urine and excrement will be in your body that it will get very difficult for you to remove all traces of it, and if that becomes difficult for you, then the ablution will as well, and if the ablution becomes difficult for you, then the Prayer will as well, and if the Prayer becomes difficult for you, then your religion will as well, and if that happens—then your reckoning and mine are in God’s Hands.

And if you wish to be free of your ego, then ignore it when it whispers to you. Pay it no heed lest it completely take control of you and not let you go. It will say to you, for example, that you are among the lost. But do not be fearful of its whisperings, and if it says what it says, stay seated if you are sitting, or standing if you are standing, or lying down if you are lying down; keep eating if you are eating, or drinking if you are drinking, or laughing if you are laughing, or praying if you are praying, or reciting if you are reciting—and so forth. Do not listen to it except when it says to you, "You are one of the faithful," or "You are one of the gnostics," or "You are in God's Hand and His grace and generosity are immense!" For it will not cease to whisper to you except if you are in the state I have described and you take refuge always in the Muhammadan *sunna*.

---

[194] According to numerous *ḥadīth*, the *sunna* of how much to put in the stomach is one third food, one third water, and to leave one third empty.

[195] In *Iḥyā’ ʿulūm al-dīn*, II, al-Ghazālī mentions four things which were considered innovations (*bidʿa*) in respect to eating: the use of tables, the use of sieves, washing with soap, and eating to repletion. Of these, he explains that only the last is truly “a reprehensible innovation.” See al-Ghazālī, *On the Manners relating to Eating*, trans. by Denys Johnson-Davies, Islamic Texts Society, Cambridge, 2000.

If, on the other hand, you listen to it when it says, "You are among the lost," then it will add, "and one of the wrong-doers!" then it will add, "and one of the corrupt," and if disbelief were not the very limit of tribulation, it would say, "you are among the disbelievers," and more.

I had a brother, may God be merciful to him, who would listen to the ego's insinuations and believe them, and because of that, he was always full of cares and sadness. One day he said to our father, may God have mercy upon him and upon us as well, "O father, I have seen that your ship is broken!" My father answered, "God forbid! It is certainly not broken. It is always as strong as it was. But you break it with you words." I was pleased with his words, very happy and renewed towards my Lord with a great renewal. For I see many people who enjoy the all-encompassing blessings of faith, health, food, drink, clothing, a mount, a spouse, and great well-being, and yet they are always careworn and narrow because of their heedlessness of God and preoccupation with their worldly lot. If they could leave that and turn towards their Lord as He commanded, all harm and wrong would depart from them, for that is something only for the people of heedlessness. As for the people of remembrance, even a bolt of lightning will not strike the one invoking God, as has been narrated.[196]

So be firm in applying this teaching, dear brother, and hold on to it with your strongest grip if you wish to make your way through all creation, and if not, be sure that creation will make its way through you as it has done through so many others. In short, if you do not act upon it, it will act upon you. Our master used to say to us: "The cosmos is always speaking to us by the tongue of its state, saying 'Either strike or incline your head.'"[197] The matter is how he described it, and God is a warrant for what we say. *Peace!*

---

[196] Ibn Mubārak in *Zuhd*, 1023, says, "I heard ᶜAṭā say, "Lightning does not strike the one invoking God."

⁂

LETTER 94

Know what you are doing

KNOW, MAY GOD be merciful to you, that I see a lot of the *fuqarā'* and others doing good deeds without knowing they are doing them and doing bad deeds without knowing they are doing them, nor do they make a distinction between obedience and sin, or we could say, between the spiritual and the human, and we seek refuge in God from that, for the one who knows what he is doing is not like the one who does not: *Say, "Are those who know and those who do not know equal?"* [39:9] and *Are darkness and light equal?* [13:16]. Without a doubt, if someone cannot distinguish between obedience and sin or between the spiritual and human, then his inner reality is benighted, not illuminated—and may God take us by the hand. *Peace!*

⁂

LETTER 95

Silence and hunger

THERE IS NOTHING more conducive to inner collectedness than silence and hunger, just as there is nothing more dispersive than too much food and too much talk, even if it is about what concerns us. Surely the believer is someone with little talk and much practice, for silence results in reflection, reflection is a practice of the heart, and the smallest amount of practice by the heart is better than mountains of physical practice, or as a tradition states: "An hour of reflection is better than seventy years of physical worship."[198]

---

[197] The meaning of this passage is that someone who does not actively follow the Way is at the mercy of creation and subject to all its vicissitudes.

[198] See footnote 44.

LETTER 96

A long letter concerning formal knowledge and God-given knowledge, humility, and other subjects

KNOW, SĪDĪ AḤMAD al-Akaᶜrīr al-Zayyātī, may God be pleased with you, that I saw one of your letters in which you said that the eminent scholar, the *sharīf*, Sīdī Abū'l-ᶜAbbās Aḥmad ibn ᶜAjība al-Manjarī,[b] may God be merciful to him, has a great interest in the books of Sufism and especially the *Ḥikam* of Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh,[b] and that he has written a commentary on the *Ṣalāt al-Mashishiyya*,[199] and it seems to me that you are similar to him in that respect. For that reason, I would ask you to beware of stopping your journey [with books], for even if the books themselves are beautiful and good, to stop your journey with them is not.[200] This is because spiritual mysteries are not found in lines on the page but rather in the breasts, even as the Mighty Qur'ān states, *And what lies within breasts is made known* [100:10]. Those divine gifts which were given to Sīdī al-Junayd, Sīdī al-Jilānī, Sīdī al-Ghazālī, Sīdī al-Shādhilī,[b] our master, Sīdī ᶜAlī, and others like them will also be given, God willing, to Sīdī Aḥmad Akaᶜrīr and Sīdī Aḥmad ibn ᶜAjība and to us and others if we put into practice what we know. A tradition states, "Whosoever acts upon what he knows, God will cause to inherit knowledge of what he knows not."[201] So do not be veiled from your own spiritual insights by the spiritual insights of others, for each one of you [two] contains as many spiritual insights as there are waves in the ocean, and you both know that if you put into practice what you know, God will cause you to inherit knowledge of what you do not know.

Ibn al-Ḥawārī[b] said of his master al-Dārānī ؓ,[b] "When a servant resolves to abandon sin, his soul ranges the celestial domains and there come to him pearls of wisdom without his ever having been taught the learning of the learned."[202] Thus it is with our respected masters, the Sufis, may God be pleased with them:

---

[199] This commentary has appeared in English in two separate translations.

[200] See footnote 90 concerning "stopping."

[201] See footnote 6.

> The hearts of gnostics have eyes which see what on-lookers cannot,
> And tongues which utter secrets hidden from the Noble Scribes,[203]
> And wings that, without plumage, fly to the *Malakūt.*

Sīdī Aḥmad al-Ḥaddād al-Khumsī[b] said to Sīdī ibn ᶜAskar,[b] author of *Dawḥat al-Nāshir* when they were speaking of Sufism رضي الله عنهم and Ibn ᶜAskar would frequently quote the words of the masters, saying, "How long are you going to say, 'So-and-so said' or 'according to so-and-so'?' What do *we* say, *you and* I?' And Sīdī ᶜAlī Maymūn's[b] shaykh al-Dabbās in Jarīd[204] told him something similar to this according to *al-Dawḥat.*[205]

But do not imagine, Sīdī Aḥmad Akaᶜrīr, that I am cautioning you against studying religious knowledge, for our Lord cannot be worshipped without knowledge. I am only cautioning you against stopping your spiritual journey there. How could I caution you against religious knowledge when there is no one greater than the Messenger of God ﷺ to whom God said, ... *Say, "My Lord! Increase me in knowledge!"* [20:114], and he himself said ﷺ, "If there is day in which I do not increase in the knowledge which brings me closer to God Most High, then I am not blessed by the rising of the sun upon that day."[206]

---

[202] *Ḥilya,* vol. 10, chapter on al-Ḥawārī.

[203] An expression from the Qur'ān, 82:11, meaning the angels which record a human being's deeds.

[204] Al-Jarīd is the region of Tunisia near the huge salt lake of the same name.

[205] In *Dawḥat al-Nāshir*, page 20, it is recounted that he travelled from Morocco to Jarīd (in present-day Tunisia), where he had heard he could find a certain shaykh of spiritual training (*shaykh al-tarbiyya*). When he came to where the shaykh lived, he camped outside his door waiting for him to come out. When he did, Sīdī Maymūn was reading the *Risālat al-Qushayriyya* and first thing the shaykh told him was, "Put aside your book and starting digging into the earth of your soul until you find a spring. Otherwise, leave me."

[206] A saying narrated with various wordings by Abū Nuᶜaym in *Ḥilya*, in *al-Awsaṭ* of Ṭabarānī, in Ibn ᶜAbd al-Barr in *Jāmiᶜ al-bayān al-ᶜilm wa faḍlih*, and several other sources.

Nor do I dislike the study of the books of Sufism, which hold extraordinary benefits. Indeed, [the Sufis themselves] say, "Beware of frequenting three types of people: heedless despots, hypocritical reciters of the Qur'ān, and ignorant people attracted to Sufism." If it were not for knowledge, Sīdī Aḥmad, all of us would be useless. But if we truly depend on our Lord, there will come to us the sorts of God-given knowledge that come to anyone who empties his heart of the world. The great shaykh, Sīdī Abū'l-ᶜAbbās Aḥmad Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh[b] says in his *Ḥikam* [205, 206]: "Sometimes lights come upon you and find the heart stuffed with the forms of created things; so they go back from whence they descended. Empty your heart of alterities and you will fill it up with gnostic intuitions and mysteries."

By God, O Sīdī Aḥmad Akaᶜrīr, the only thing holding us back is that we lack a genuine need for our Lord. If we truly realized our need for God, He would enrich us as He did others like us, for He has said, *If they are poor, God will enrich them from His Bounty* [24:32], and *Charitable offerings are only for the poor* [9:60].

Lowliness and neediness are two of our most essential attributes, yet even so it is hard for us to realize them. But there is no road to true freedom except through the door of lowliness and need, so take that door, Sīdī, if you wish to succeed.

Be lowly before the One you love to merit honor.
What honor a person attains by being lowly!
If the One you love is powerful and you are not humble
before Him
Then bid your hopes of arrival goodbye.

And another said:

Be lowly before the One you love: love is never easy,
But if the Beloved is pleased with you, you will surely be
united.

And another said:

If you cannot be patiently humble in your love,
Then the Beloved will leave you no matter what else you do.

And Ibn al-Fāriḍ[b] said:

If lowliness were not honored in love,
Love, for me, would hold no delight
And were it not for love,
My honor would not be in lowliness.[207]

Shaykh al-Shādhilī ﵇[b] said, "By God, I have never seen honor except in humility," and we say, may God be pleased with us, "By God, I have never seen humility except in neediness." The one who wants his soul to be lowly should deprive it of the world and its people, "except those whose states inspires you and whose speech leads you to God."[208] for this deprivation is what is hardest on the ego. Arise for this, O Sīdī Aḥmad, and for nothing else, and you will see marvels! And beware of saying, "[I cannot do it] until … until …," and so on, until there comes to you [the angel of death], and he gets you up, leaves you to yourself, engrossed with yourself, and death comes to you in the wilderness, alone, without a tender and compassionate companion or a close friend, and squeezes the life out of you, and then leads you to your Lord, willingly or not. Then no one will know your state then except Him, nor do you know what He will do with you, but what is most likely is that you will be in fear and strife, and *strife is worse than slaying* [2:191]—may God take you and me by the hand!

Only the one who has rid his heart of the love of this world can really understand the neediness of which I speak, but listen to something about it, O Sīdī Aḥmad. Ibn ᶜAskar[b] said in *Dawḥat*, "More than one trustworthy person from among the *shurafā'* of Meknes told me that one year there was severe hardship (caused by drought) and they went to Shaykh Abū al-Rawāyin al-Majdhūb ﵇[b] to ask him to pray for rain with them. He said to them, "Wait for me until I get back," and then went inside his house and gave away in charity everything that was in it, and then came out wearing only an old grain sack,[209] and went along with them, saying, "Now let us stand in Prayer, for our supplication will be real and our Prayer will be sincere." And they had not returned [from the place of Prayer] before they were nearly drowned by torrential rains."[210]

---

[207] This follows the text found in the published *Dīwān*, p. 36.

[208] Paraphrasing *Ḥikam* 43, "Do not keep company with anyone whose state does not inspire you and whose speech does not lead you to God."

[209] *Al-tillīs* , basically equivalent to a large burlap bag, used in Morocco at one time as clothes by the extremely poor.

Such things arise from the secret of neediness. Its secrets are many, marvelous, and strange, but it is enough for us to mention the words of God Most High, *If they are poor, God will enrich them from His Bounty* [24:32] and *Charitable offerings are only for the poor* [9:60]. Shaykh Abū Rawāyin al-Majdhūb was one of the masters of the great Shaykh Sīdī Abū Zayd ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān al-Majdhūb ؓ.[b]

As for the devotional practice you are doing, O Sīdī Aḥmad, it is clear, but I would like you to understand this: if you direct your energy towards outward practice, you will have none left for inward practice, for strength does not reside in both directions as we have said to you before and have repeated numerous times that hopefully it might be heard.

We have also said in certain spiritual teachings that we do not want someone to be always saying "*Allāh*, *Allāh*," while he is passionately in love with the world and brimming over with people's chatter. Rather, we want someone to keep the obligatory worship and the confirmed *sunna*, to stay clear of what does not concern him, and to ceaselessly work towards acquiring noble character. Then, if he says "*Allāh*" one time, or offers the Prayer one time, or recites one sūra of the Qur'ān, it will be better for him than a thousand times while his state is reprehensible—and God knows best. If you understand this, O Sīdī Aḥmad, and put it into practice, it will be easier for your soul and you will bear it and advance with it towards your Lord, for without a doubt, … *to forgo is nearer to reverence* [2:237, 5:8]—and God knows best. No one knows the mystery of lowliness which I have referred to above except someone who has abandoned his ego, or as one of them has said, "This path of ours is for people who sweep the rubbish heaps with their spirits."

---

[210] This is mentioned in *Dawḥat*, pp. 80-81, where the text adds that he "did not leave in his home even a morsel of bread or a kernel of grain." The prayer for rain, *ṣalāt al-istisqā'*, is offered outside and the worshippers are encouraged to come to it in their humblest clothes.

Also, it is indispensable to have a shaykh in this craft as in other crafts—and God knows better—for they say, "Whoever has no shaykh, the Devil is his shaykh," and "Whoever has no shaykh, has no *qibla*." And ibn Shaybān ﵁[b] said, "Whoever has no master has no way. To remove intermediaries is disorder, while to attribute to them actions is a deviation."[211]

We see—and God knows best—that someone who is granted an opening into the science of the real without an intermediary must take, according to the code of its practitioners, a master from among its masters, that is, from the masters of this science if he can find one, and no one is deprived of this except someone who has been persuaded by his ego that he does not need one. For someone who [truly] needs a teacher, I believe he will find him wherever he might be. Either the master will come to the disciple or the disciple will come to the master, which is to say that by God's decree the master will be brought to the disciple or the disciple to the master, and God is a warrant for what we say.

As for the one who tries to walk the path without a master but rather by the opinions of his ego alone, it will be for him as Sīdī Abū'l-Ḥamīd al-Ghazālī ﵁[b] said in *Bidāyat al-hidāya*: that nothing comes from a disciple without a master; he is like a tree that grows in the wilderness whose fruit never ripens.

Anyone who says that there is no shaykh today is mistaken. Listen, O Sīdī Aḥmad, to what happened to a person from the east who came to our land, Morocco. He was asking about the pole (*quṭb*) and met the great master Sīdī ᶜAbd al-Wārith al-Yālṣūtī[b] of the Banī Zarwāl who told him, "If God had opened your inner vision, you would have found him in front of you." And as for the saying of Sīdī Abū'l-ᶜAbbās Aḥmad Zarrūq,[b] citing his master al-Ḥaḍramī, I have not heard it, and if I had, I would not report it because I know nothing of the one who said it.[212] We know of him, in fact, only blessing, or we could equally say wisdom, which will not cease as long as the Kingdom of Gods exists, for He has said, *No sign do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but that We bring that which is better than it or like unto it. Do you not know that God is Powerful over all things? Do you not know that unto God belongs Sovereignty over the heavens and the earth, and that you have neither protector nor helper apart from God?* [2:106-107]

---

[211] See footnote 56.

[212] The saying in question is, in all probability, the one which is referred to in Chapter 5 of *Kitāb al-ibrīz* in which Sīdī ᶜAbd al-ᶜAzīz al-Debbagh is asked about the saying of Zarrūq, "The way of training disciples by 'usage' (*iṣṭilāḥ*) has ceased and all that remains is training by aspiration and state (*al-himma wa'l-ḥāl*). So I enjoin upon you the Book and *sunna* without adding [to them] or reducing [them]." The translators

When I was young, many *fuqahā'* and others opposed me, but my mind never accepted their opposition nor was my heart ever open to it—that was by the grace and favor of God. The spiritual paths that

---

of *al-Ibrīz* note that they were unable to find this quotation in Zarrūq's *Qawā'id al-Taṣawwuf* (see page 614 of the translation), but Ibn ᶜAjība refers to this quotation in *Baḥr al-Madīd* in his commentary on Q. 22:67—*For every community We have appointed a rite they are to perform; so let them not argue with you over the matter. And call to your Lord.*—where he writes:

> Just as revealed laws have differed for differing religions, so too have the ways of spiritual training differed according to individuals and times. God's words, *For every community We have appointed a rite* go back to the question of aspiration and state. Initially, those in combination with spiritual companionship were enough, and by way of them came self-discipline, purification, and the perfection of gnosis. That was in the time of the Companions and the Successors, and lasted until the third century, for they were all still close enough to the Prophetic Light. Following that, however, when people were more remote and hearts became darker, training by way of "usage" appeared. This meant donning a certain garment, like the patched robe, wearing large rosaries around the neck, carrying a small kettle, and other such outward signs of renunciation, practices by which the ego dies and the heart is cured, and which include the recitation of special litanies. Training was thus by aspiration, state, and outward usage, although it could still come to someone who had aspiration and station without any outward usage. The situation stayed like this until the ninth century, when the way of outward usage was overtaken by pretenders who had neither aspiration nor state. So when al-Ḥaḍramī said referring to them, "The way of training by usage has ceased and all that is left is aspiration and state," he meant outward usage without aspiration and state has ceased....This is to say that al-Ḥaḍramī was judging only his own time, based on what he had seen of the corruption that had entered the Way, but there came after him people who were trained through outer usage, along with aspiration and state. And by aspiration, I mean the knowledge of God which comes through perception and vision; and by state, I mean the awakening of hearts to the remembrance of God upon being seen, following the words of the Prophet ﷺ "The best of you are those who when they are seen, God is remembered,"

al-Ḥaḍramī followed were branches, not the root. The true root is the pure Shādhilī way which none will change nor alter until the last hour of creation, as the great shaykh Sīdī al-Kharūbī al-Ṭarābulsī[b] said to Sīdī Abū Ḥafṣ ᶜUmar ibn ᶜAbd al-Wahhāb al-Ḥasanī al-ᶜAlamī, one of the grandsons of the Pole, our master ᶜAbd al-Salām ibn Mashīsh رضي الله عنه[b]: "This Ṭarīqa has protectors who protect it and guards who guard it until the Day of Resurrection. They are the people of God, the helpers of His religion, to whom God has given both exoteric and esoteric knowledge and has supported through His Name *The Victorious* and *the Protector*..." And I think you know this from the answers that al-Kharūbī[b] gave about the states characteristic of the pole, for I have seen some of it in your own handwriting at the end of (the copy of) my letters which you had.

We were speaking one day about this question (of the pole) and about acquiring the virtue of mercy and we had become completely absorbed in this subject when God helped us: for we suddenly saw proof about the states of the pole of which we had previously no knowledge. Rather, our Lord brought this to us from the Unseen, and from nearby, not from somewhere far, and from the people of gnosis, no one else. This is something that happens only for people of great sincerity, and it happened for us—praise and thanks be to God.

We do not like anyone who [wants to] close the door to God in the faces of His servants. That door is eternally open! In fact, we disapprove of such a person totally—and may God be a warrant for what we say. We see excellence only in someone who makes things wider and easier for God's servants in the matters that concern them by way of verses [from the Qur'ān] and *ḥadīth*. We also see that if someone makes things narrow for people, God will make things narrow for him; if someone makes things wide for people, God will make things wide for him; if someone treats people with harshness, God will treat him with harshness; if someone makes things difficult for people, God will make things difficult for him; and if someone makes things easy for people, God will make things easy for him. There is no doubt that the people with purpose, love, sincerity, and a good opinion of others[213] will not be cut off from their Lord by anyone nor prevented from reaching Him by any obstacle, for they are always and ever for Him and He is for them, without any barrier between them. The Shaykh al-Būṣīrī [b] said in his *Burda*:

---

[213] See footnote 133.

> You gave me sincere counsel, but I did not hear it
> The lover is quite deaf to those who blame him.[214]

They are—may God bless us and them and be for us and for them—always turning in repentance, always returning to God, always asking, always in prayer. The door of generosity, that is the door, O you who do not know right from wrong. And as for anyone who wishes to enter by another door, they will never do so: God Most High has said, *And were it not for God's Bounty upon you, and His Mercy, you would have been among the losers* [2:64]; *Were it not for God's Bounty toward you, and His Mercy, you would surely have followed Satan, save a few* [4:83]. *And were it not for God's Bounty toward you, and His Mercy, not one of you would ever be pure* [24:21].

He brings near to Him those who are near without any secondary causes, and He removes whom He removes without any secondary causes: *He for whom God has not appointed any light has no light* [24:40]. *Peace!*

⁂

LETTER 97

A time each day for remembrance; more on the saying of Shaykh Zarrūq

I ADVISE YOU, my respected friends, to always make a time for God Most High, free from any other preoccupations or egoistic purposes, at night or by day, during which to recite the Word of God, or to invoke the formula *lā ilāha illa'Llāh*, or the Name of God alone, or to offer what Prayers you able, or invoke blessings upon the Messenger of God ﷺ. If you can follow this, God will grant you an opening beyond that which He has granted you thus far, and manifest His grace towards you as He has manifested it towards other learned folk like you. Do not be satisfied with the outward knowledge you already have, but rather, seek inward knowledge as you seek outward knowledge and do what is necessary to attain them both.

---

[214] *The Burda*, *op. cit.*, line 11.

Be among the people of hearts and limbs, not just among the people of limbs, [for as the *ḥadīth* states]: "God does not look at your forms nor at your bodies. God looks at your hearts."[215] And in the Book of God Most High: *Truly it is not the eyes that go blind, but it is hearts within breasts that go blind* [22:46], and *They have hearts with which they understand not* ... [7:179], and other such verses.

Pay no attention at all to those who say, "Today, only the people of the outward are left, but as for those of the inward, *That is a community that has passed away* [2:134]." This idea has been voiced about a lot by certain scholars, but the situation is not as they think. In fact, it is quite the contrary, but...

> ...The eye may reject the sun's light when it is inflamed
> And when the body is unwell,
> The mouth may shun even the taste of sweet water[216]

By God, respected friends, how many a one has God graced with inward knowledge and spiritual openings since the words of Shaykh Abū'l-ᶜAbbās Aḥmad Zarrūq[b]—a multitude of people, in fact, from among the learned and others. If someone wants to ascertain what is true from what is false, let him empty his heart of the love of this world and of self-satisfaction. In abandoning the love of this world, his illumination will grow stronger, and by the strength of his illumination, his certitude will grow stronger, and by the strength of his certitude, his aspiration will transcend all that exists and arrive at the One Who brings all into existence, which is to say, he will arrive at the knowledge of God.

This is my belief, and I will keep to it until I meet my Lord, and I believe nothing other than this. "Whoever belongs to God, God belongs to him,"[217] and how can someone to whom God belongs ever be deprived of blessing and goodness? That is not possible.

---

[215] See footnote 41.

[216] *The Burda*, line 104. Spiker, *op. cit.*

[217] This saying has sometimes been narrated as a *ḥadīth*.

If we say to you, "Make a time for God Most High free from all preoccupations and egoistic purposes," it is because someone who does this will always be open to lights and secrets, and that is the state of the elect. Someone who has this state comes to know what is true from what is false, and to know this is, in itself, a high degree very unlike the state of someone who lacks it, someone who is among the generality of the faithful, and therefore sees only what the generality see.

[Returning to] Shaykh Aḥmad Zarrūq's words, "The people of spiritual training have ceased to be," I suspect he may have said this before he himself came to know who they were and before God granted him the spiritual opening He had granted them. In fact, this did not come to him until towards the end of his life, and he did not live many years afterwards. Someone who lives for many years after having been granted a spiritual opening is not the same as someone who dies soon afterwards, just as someone who comes to a land and lives there until he becomes acquainted with both the elect and the generality of its inhabitant is not like someone who arrives there in the morning and leaves in the evening. *Peace!*

⁂

LETTER 98

The proximity of God

STRANGEST OF THE strange is someone who sees only distance when in reality there is no distance, only proximity, as God Most High says, *And We are nearer to him than his jugular vein* [50:16]. All the people of realization affirm this. One of them said, "If I were charged with finding other than God, I would not be able to do so, for this is nothing else besides Him that I could perceive along with Him," And another of them said:

Since I came to know God, I see no other
For us that "other" is forbidden.

Since I was united, I fear no separation,
and today I have wholly arrived.

The people of realization refuse to witness anything other than God, as another of them[218] said:

Say "Allāh!" and let go of existence with all it contains,
If you desire the attainment of perfection.

For everything other than God, were you to realize it,
Is nothing, whether in part or as a whole.

And know that you and all the worlds,
Were it not for Him, would be obliterated and effaced.

As for the one who has no existence in and of himself,
Were it not for God, 'his' existence would be utterly impossible.

The gnostics have been annihilated-- they perceive
Nothing but the Imperious, the Most Exalted.

They see what is other than Him actually perishing,
In the present, in the past, and in the future.[219]

And the great shaykh Sīdī Abū Zayd ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān al-Majdhūb[b] said:

My vision vanished in His vision
and I was effaced from all ephemeral things.
I affirmed I could find none other than God
And at peace in my state, I passed the night.

The strangest of the strange are those whom people consider to be among the people of nearness who see only distance, while in truth there is no distance, only nearness. *Peace!*

---

[218] The author of the verses that follow is Abū Madyan.

[219] Quoted from Cornell, *op. cit.* p. 168, with some small modifications.

LETTER 99

A dream

I ASK GOD Most High that the dream in which you saw me might be a means towards great guidance for you, for there are many to whom God grants spiritual opening through a dream, and the Prophet's mission ﷺ began with a vision. Stay ever near to people of goodness, O *faqīr*, and far from people of evil. Keep out of what does not concern you, work to acquire the virtues of your Prophet ﷺ, and you will see marvels. *Peace!*

LETTER 100

Caution against imitating worldly scholars

O *FAQĪR*, know that I would like you to mold your character opposite to the character of most of the *fuqahā'* of your time, may God be kind with them, for they have turned away from trying to have noble character and have acquired reproachful character instead. They know, but they do not practice what they know. They are proud, not humble, avaricious, not satisfied, desirous, not detached, miserly, not generous .... And God is greater! How far they are from knowledge and how close they are to ignorance! Flee from them, dear brother, and do not give them a second glance. If you wish to inherit from the Prophets (God's blessings and salutations of peace be upon them) then work to acquire their virtues and travel their Way.

The secret, grace, blessing, and goodness in abandoning this world—that is the way of the Prophets (God's blessings and salutations of peace be upon them) and saints ؓ. Inward and outward withdrawal from the world is a *sunna* of the Prophet ﷺ, and whoever holds fast to the *sunna* has been guided by his Lord. This is what I enjoin upon you, and may God grant you His accord. *Peace!*

⁂

LETTER 101

Integrity

INNER AND OUTER integrity is something we must have, but none of us will attain this, regardless of our practices—neither the scholar nor the one who fasts by day and keeps vigils by night—without ridding our hearts of the love of this world, and a sign that this love has left our heart is that we feel contracted when we are given the world and expanded when we are deprived of it. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 102

Respect for the masters of the Way

KNOW, MAY GOD be merciful to you, that it is the masters of the Way who combine within themselves ecstatic attraction (*jadhb*) and method (*suluk*)—or we could say intoxication and sobriety—who are mediators between us and our Lord,[220] not those who are methodic but not ecstatic, nor those who are ecstatic but not methodic—or we could say not those who are intoxicated but not sober or who are sober but not intoxicated.[221] Anyone who is attached to such a master is rescued, and anyone who turns away from such a master drowns; or as the Sufis say, "Whoever has no shaykh, the Devil is his shaykh."

We also urge you in the strongest terms to esteem your teachers, your brothers, and the rest of your Lord's servants, for by that esteem, you yourself will be esteemed, whereas by disrespecting them, you yourself will be disrespected.

I gazed upon them, they gazed towards me,
And my eyes were ennobled by seeing them...

---

[220] The word "mediator" (*al-wāsiṭatu*) is used in the sense of someone who reflects the divine qualities in his or her human nature and is therefore a perfect example to be emulated, not as someone who is an intermediary between God and His servants, which is the Christian doctrine.

[221] See also letter 76 where he talks about ecstasy and method.

… as Sīdī Muḥammad al-Sharqāwī[b] said, may God benefit us through him. Indeed, beware of disrespecting them, for as the folk say, "There is no repentance for impudence towards spiritual masters."[222] *Peace.*

LETTER 103

Companionship (*ṣuḥba*) through correspondence

PLEASE KNOW, MAY God be merciful to you, that I have written you a number of times but I do not know if my letters reached you or not. From now on, if you to write me, make sure that the one who carries the letter does not get involved in anything else until he has delivered it to me and he has brought you my response. That is its outer aspect: that it be from you to me and from me to you without any obstacles. Then it will be water flowing between us, and otherwise, not. For us and for all those at the station of self-effacement, the sensory world and the spiritual world are identical, and so if the exchange between us is physically without obstacles, it will be spiritually so as well. The folk say, "None of those who succeed in the Way do so except through companionship with someone who has succeeded, and none of those who fail in the Way do so except through the companionship with someone who has failed." So our companionship can be strong—God willing—(even through correspondence) but only on the condition that it be without any obstacles, as we said.

LETTER 104

A great mercy will spread through creation

AS YOU LOVE us, we love you—and may God be a warrant for what we say! We would like you to be ever near to mercy, ever immersed in it, and since the Messenger of God ﷺ is the very spring of mercy, draw near to him by invoking God's blessings and peace upon him in abundance (*bi kathrati al-ṣalāti ᶜalayhi wa al-salām*), as we have said to you before. Also, keep away from anything that makes you too busy for your

---

[222] This saying appears in the *Risālat al-Qushariyya*, Part 3. See Knysh, *op. cit.* p. 340.

Lord, and be as unconcerned with your stomachs and your outward appearance as you can, for being unconcerned with those things brings extraordinary benefits. It also seems to me that someone who is satisfied with [his lot in] this world, who perpetually weans himself away [from it], who pays little regard to his appearance and his stomach, who keeps the obligatory practices and the confirmed *sunna*, and who stays clear of what does not concern him, is someone truly immersed in the Muhammadan *sunna*, while someone who is involved with a multitude of other things is not so, not a *sunnī*—and God knows best.

A great mercy will come to spread through creation—God willing—just as it did in the time of al-Junayd, al-Ghazālī, al-Shādhilī, al-Ḥātimī,[b] and their like رضي الله عنهم, for all of them were like pure hearts placed in the midst of creation, their beauty and goodness shone throughout creation, and great good came out of it. If a heart contains beauty, that goodness cannot but appear in the limbs of the body, and if a heart contains ugliness, that ugliness cannot but appear on the limbs of the body. This is a well-known truth. *Peace.*

LETTER 105

Knowing God both in hardship and ease

THE ILLNESS THAT has afflicted you afflicts those who are beloved to God: "Those more sorely tried are the prophets then the saints, then those who are like them, then those who are like them."[223] So do not be sad on its account, for it usually does not happen except to the people of sincerity and love in order that their hearts might be purified and made like jewels. Were it not for encounters with reality (*al-taᶜrifāt*), not a single soul would attain gnosis. Far from it! "Were it not for the arenas of the soul, the voyaging of the adepts could not be realized," as Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh says in the *Ḥikam* [244], and also, "My God, from the diversity of created things and the changes of states, I know that it is Your desire to make Yourself known to me in everything so that I will not ignore You in anything." [*Munājāt*, 11]· The Sufis also say, "In times of turmoil are the men distinguished from men."[224] And in the Mighty Qurᶜān it is said, *Alif. Lām. Mīm. Does mankind suppose that they will be left to say, "We believe," and that they will not be tried?* [29:1].

---

[223] This *ḥadīth* with various wordings appears as the title of a section in Bukhārī, Book of Illness, as well as in Imam Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, Nasāᶜī, *al-Sunnan*, Ṭabarānī, *al-Kabīr*, Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab al-Īmān*, and many other sources.

Hear, too, about the state of those who know God: when it was said to our lord, ᶜUmar ibn ᶜAbd al-ᶜAzīz ؓ, "What do you desire?" he answered, "Whatever God decrees."[225] And the illustrious shaykh, our master ᶜAbd al-Qādir al-Jilānī ؓ said,

> It is not for me to try to flee from trials
> nor to be overcome when gifts come my way.
> I am not of those who try to trade some things for others.
> I am one who is content with it all.

And the illustrious shaykh Sīdī Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh says in the *Ḥikam* [105] : "To soften for you the suffering of affliction, He has taught you that He is the one who causes trials to come upon you."

No doubt, for the people of the Way, the noblest of times are times of privation, by which I mean times when they are in need, for those are the times in which they grow, even as Sīdī Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh says in the *Ḥikam* [175]: "Your best moment is wherein you witness your actual indigence and, through it, are returned to the reality of your lowliness," and also, "Sometimes you will find more benefit in states of need than you will find in fasting or prayer."[100]

(The word) *al-fāqa* refers to extreme need. Our master's master, Sīdī al-ᶜArabī ibn ᶜAbdallāh, would call it "the inciter," because it incites the one who experiences it towards his Lord. And our master (Sīdī ᶜAlī) would say, "If people knew what secrets and goodness reside in states of need, they would not need anything except need." He would also say, "Being in a state of need takes the place of [invoking] the Supreme Name of God," and he used to explain the meaning of "ability"

---

[224] "Men" in this saying means, in the first instance, the true Sufis, and in the second, human beings. It is not used to indicate gender.

[225] Imam al-Ghazālī mentions this saying in *al-Iḥyā'*, IV: 6, 534, along with the other famous saying of ᶜUmar ibn ᶜAbd al-ᶜAzīz, "The only joy that is left for me is in the fulfillment of God's decree."

(*al-qadr*) as “narrowness” (*al-ḍayq*).[226]

We also believe that our knowledge of God can repel from us tribulations even as it repelled them from the Prophets (God’s blessings and salutations of peace be upon them) and saints ؓ. God Most High said, *“O Fire! Be coolness and peace for Abraham.” They desired to scheme against him, but We made them the greatest losers and We delivered him* ... [21:69-71]. He also said, *And it will be said unto those who are reverent, “What has your Lord sent down?” They will say, “Goodness”* [16:30] even while God, in His love and care for them, had sent down the greatest of trials,[227] as the Qur’ān states elsewhere, *And how many a Prophet was slain* ... [3:146][228] and also *If a wound afflicts you, a like wound has already afflicted that people* [3:140], and so forth. But the knowledge [that the Prophets and saints] have of their Lord and their being immersed in the contemplation of the infinitude of His Essence removes them from both good and evil. They are people who no longer see good and no longer see evil, but rather who contemplate their Lord. They witness only Him in bounty and in adversity and see Him in benefaction as well as in affliction, for He is the One Who gives bounty and He is the one Who gives affliction. Just as they witness Him in what He gives, so do they witness Him in what He withholds, and so forth.

Sīdī Ibn ᶜAṭā’illāh says in his *Ḥikam* [93]: “When He gives to you, He shows you His goodness and when He deprives you, He shows you His power, and in all that, He is making Himself known to you and coming to you with His gentleness.” In a word, for such people, He is the Majestic and He is the Beautiful One, so they do not recognize trials as such. They are experienced (as trials) only by people of the veil, not by people for whom the veil has been lifted. The cause of suffering is the existence of the veil, and the perfection of bliss is to look upon the

---

[226] “Ability” is used here to mean the illusion that someone is “able” to do whatever he wishes and has no need of God or anyone else.

[227] The verse contains the verb *anzala* which is usually translated in this context as “revealed”, but the Shaykh is taking it in its literal sense of “sent down”.

[228] There are two variant readings of the verb QTL in this verse. In the Warsh recitation, with which the Shaykh would have been most familiar, the verb is *qutilu*, “he was slain,” while in the Ḥafṣ recitation which is most common outside of Morocco, the verb is *qātala*, “he battled.”

Countenance of God, the Infinitely Generous. "That which hearts find in the way of worries and sadness is due to that which prevents them from having inner vision," as Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh says in the *Ḥikam* [224]. *Peace*

⁂

LETTER 106

Imagination[229]

IMAGINATION IS SOMETHING without substance, but God brought it into existence by His great wisdom. Everything possesses a great secret and a clear and evident face, even as God says, *Our Lord, You have not created this in vain. Glory be to You!* [3:191], and *Did you suppose, then, that We created you frivolously?* [23:115]. Far be it for our Lord to create in jest. Exalted be He above that!

Imagination is such that if you do not gain mastery over it—by which I mean subject it to the way you see things—it will gain mastery over you and subject you to the way it sees things. If you do not negate its view, it will negate your view. Even while it is nothing, if you listen to what it tells you, it will undermine your certitude and take you off the path. But if you do not listen to what it says, your light will get stronger, and by its strength, your certitude will increase, and by its strength, your spiritual aspiration will ascend, and by its ascent you will reach your Lord, which is to say, you will reach the knowledge of God.

For those who do not listen to its talk nor follow it, it becomes like a wind that comes to sailors and fills their sails so that in a single hour they arrive at what others cannot reach in a month, and God knows best. But someone who listens to its talk becomes marooned on a desert island, as happens to sailors. Such is the way imagination works.

We also see that someone who keeps out of what does not concern him finds sufficiency through the smallest amount of toil in the world, while for someone who does not, nothing is enough for him, no matter what he does.[230] *Peace.*

---

[229] *Al-wahm*, which is also translated as "illusion", includes all the notions of imagination, fantasy, fiction, and deception. It is used here in a more positive sense.

[230] Paying too much attention to our imaginings often results in our getting involved in what does not really concern us.

LETTER 107

In the remembrance of God resides all good

IN THE REMEMBRANCE of God resides all good, for God Most High has said, *Men who remember God often and women who remember [God often], God has prepared forgiveness and a great reward* [33:35], and *So remember Me, and I shall remember you* [2:152], and *Woe unto those whose hearts are hardened to the remembrance of God!—They are in manifest error* [39:22]. And the Prophet ﷺ conveyed these words from his Lord: "I am seated with the one who remembers Me..." and also, "I am with him when he remembers Me ...."[231] This alone bears witness to the excellence of remembrance and the reproachful state of the someone who neglects it, and if the verses and *ḥadīth* we have mentioned are not enough for us, then nothing is and we are devoid of goodness. God has made the recompense [of those who remember Him] so great that there is really nothing else we need—only to oppose our desires, for doing so will bring us God-given knowledge, and that knowledge in turn will bring us a certitude that is free of doubts and imaginings and will transport us into the Presence of the Knowing Sovereign, be He glorified, there is no god but He. *Peace.*

LETTER 108

The danger of being naive; knowing your place in creation

NAIVETY (*al-ghashīma*) can surely get someone killed if his time has come. A naive action may appear to people as something intentionally

---

[231] Each of these is a phrase from a *ḥadīth qudsī*. The first appears in a narration quoted in Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab al-Īmān*, in Aḥmad, *Kitāb al-zuhd*, in *Kashf al-khafāʾ*, and elsewhere, that begins, "Moses ﷺ said, 'O Lord, are You near that I might speak to You intimately or are You far such that I must call to You?" The second phrase is part of a *ḥadīth* which appears in various forms in Bukhārī, Muslim, and most other primary sources which begins, "I am as My servant supposes Me to be (*ana ʿinda ẓanni ʿabdī bī*) and I am with him when he remembers Me...."

[bad] on the part of the one who does it, and they will slay him for the error they see in him. By God, I used to think that it was people who [...] treated me like a fool, belittled me, debased me, scorned me, did not know me, and did not know my worth. Then, when God, by His generosity and grace, opened my inner vision and illuminated my soul, I found that it was actually my own ego which was doing all those things to me and nothing else, and I found many Qur'anic verses which bore witness to this, such as the words of the God Most High, *Truly God alters not what is in a people until they alter what is in themselves* [13:11] [232] and *Truly God does not wrong human beings in the least, but rather human beings wrong themselves* [10:44], and *Whatever evil befalls you, it is from yourself* [4:79], and others. When I came to realize this, I saw that evil arises only from the ego and from no other source.

Know, may God bless you, that if you come to know your true worth and your place [in creation] as it really is, then all existence will know your worth and the sublimity of your place in creation, just as if you are ignorant of your own worth, all existence will be ignorant of it as well, and may God curse any who would lie to you. This is because your own soul, O believer, to the extent that you know it or are ignorant of it, and to the extent that you are a good person or a sinful one, is in reality the Cosmos in its totality. But if you do not see anything but the world that everyone sees, you will also believe that it is the world which does you harm. In truth, none but your own ego harms you, and, by God, if you gain mastery over it—or I might even say, slay it—you gain mastery over every creature, the mighty and the weak, and by God, if it gains mastery over you, every creature, the mighty and the weak, gains mastery over you as well. May God be a warrant for what we say. *Peace.*

---

[232] The Shaykh is quoting this verse in its traditional sense based on a similar verse, *That is because God never changes a blessing by which He blesses a people until they change what is in themselves,* [8:53]. That is, God will never take away the graces and blessings He gives someone unless they cease to have gratitude in their souls. The modern understanding of 13:11, that God does not improve the lot of a people until they improve themselves individually, is similar to the Protestant Ethic in Christianity. It is not, however, the way this verse is explained in the classic commentaries (*tafāsir*).

⁂

LETTER 109

The path of return

THE ORIGIN OF the soul is absolute purity, but it becomes corrupted after having been pure, lowly after having been sublime, meek after having been mighty, needy after having been independent, ignorant after having been knowing, weak after having been strong, turbid after having been clear, helpless after having been powerful, alone after having been intimate, narrow after having been vast, vanquished after have been a conqueror, humbled after having been victorious, small after having been great, enslaved after having been free, estranged to home and family after being with them, dead after having been alive, and so forth. And the reason this happens is that it has made its home in a place—this world of obscurity where we dwell—that is not its home, where it neither moves towards anything else nor finds rest—and there is neither strength nor power but through God, the Sublime and All-Mighty, and *Truly we are God's, and unto Him we return* [2:156].[233]

Such is the reason, dear brothers, and such is the illness. If we wish to return to the homeland from whence we have come, the world of purity, or we might call it the world of glistening light, or the sublime world, or the spiritual world, then nothing will benefit us except to rid ourselves of all the obscurities and disparities that veil our hearts, to strip them away as if we were skinning a slaughtered sheep, then to forget about them and never remember them again. This is the path of return, O you who do not fear hunger, nakedness, thirst, robbers, lions, scorpions, serpents, and the rest!

So Behold, dear brothers, how we have traded the highest for the lowest and yet are not ashamed before our Lord nor do we find fault with ourselves for what we have done. I have opened for you the door, raised up the veils, and brought you to sit in the company of the beloved ones. So be merciful towards me and may God be merciful toit wards you. Mention me with goodness and may God mention you with the like, come to us and be not cut off, and may God Most High, by His generosity and grace, bring you to Him. Verily He is the most excellent and most generous, the Clement and Compassionate, and the Possessor of Infinite Grace. Glory to Him! There is no god except Him! *Peace*

---

[233] This verse, which is preceded by the words *When an affliction befalls they, they say* ..., is generally the response of a Muslim to hearing of someone's death. In Morocco, it is often carved on grave stones.

LETTER 110

Sobriety and rapture

PEOPLE DO NOT look upon someone enraptured with God (*al-majdhūb*)[234] with contempt, but rather with respect, and this is so even though he does not offer the Prayer, or fast, or do any of the things that our Lord has enjoined upon us. When his mind was lost in a vision of the Majesty of his Lord, his deepest reality became illuminated, not benighted, and—by God—anyone who is like that is one of the saints.

To detach yourself from the world as you have done, my dear brother, is the state of those who are enraptured with God ﷻ and if you do not remain with it, people will see you as a fool, see only bad in you, and even insult you, and they will not be wrong, for you will have left the state of the ecstatic after having been in it, as if you had been in the state of enraptured and then had been dragged down to the state of methodical. It is inevitable that you will be hurt by the latter and also by the fomer. From both directions, you will be hurt and yet it is not they who are wronging you, but rather, you who wrong your own self by wavering, *Wavering between this [and that], being neither for one group nor for the other* [4:143]. [235]

But if you continue to stay among the enraptured, you will be shielded from any hurt from the ecstatics, even as—were you to take up the way of the methodic—you would be shielded from any hurt from the direction of the methodic. And if you could combine the two—rapture and method—or we could say the outward and the inward, or the Law and the Truth, you would be shielded from harm from both directions and you would be a Junaydian, or Ghazāliyyan, or Shādhiliyyan or Ḥātimiyyan or Mashishiyyan, or Ghaythiyyan or others like them who combined intoxication and sobriety. My Shaykh ﵁, was such a person as were his shaykhs, the sons of al-Fāsī and Ibn ʿAbdallāh, in the city of Fes, may God protect it from all tribulation, and I was thus accepted by both the people of method and the people of rapture, may God be pleased with them. *Peace.*

---

[234] The noun *majdhūb* is derived from the verb *jadhaba*, "to pull or attract," and refers to someone who is pulled towards God, the most extreme case of which is the "Divine madman," the ecstatic, the raptured. In Sufi terminology, the opposite of *majdhūb* is *sālik*, the one who journeys to God principally by following a methodic practice.

[235] The Shaykh is paraphrasing a Qur'anic description of hypocrites.

⁂

LETTER III

The sensory and the spiritual

IF YOUR SENSORY dimension diminishes, O *faqīr*, your spiritual dimension will surely be strengthened. If your outward dimension weakens, your inner dimension will surely broaden. If your outer dimension falls to ruin, your inward dimension will surely be built up.

Consider the state of the generality. Whenever they seek to beautify themselves outwardly, God makes them ugly both within and without, such that after having sniffed their presence for seven days or even a year, you will not catch the faintest whiff of the spiritual coming from them; all you will notice is the smell of sweat.

That is the recompense of someone who leaves the foundation (*al-aṣl*), which is the practice of the heart, and gets taken up by the secondary, which is the practice of the limbs. "What deprives [people of] arriving (*al-wuṣūl*) is their neglect of the fundamentals (*al-uṣūl*)." [236] The sensory world is the opposite the spiritual world, and opposites do not meet. He who wants the spiritual must abandon the sensory, and he who wants the sensory, and sensual delights, and appetites, should not hope for the spiritual, for there is no way towards this latter except by turning away from the former. *Peace.*

---

[236] See footnote 181.

LETTER 112

Let your discourse be about what slays the ego

KNOW (MAY GOD BE MERCIFUL TO YOU) that I would like the discourse between you to be about what slays your egos and gives life to your hearts, as it was for those people of the Way who came before you. And beware of getting into private intrigues amongst yourselves lest God's support for you be cut off. He who desires that Divine support not be cut off does not exalt his ego. Rather he humbles it and even casts it away, keeps it lowly, and directs it, despite itself, towards what it dislikes. This is how people of sincerity deal with the ego: they only direct it towards what it dislikes, what weighs upon it, what it finds repulsive, until what it hates and what it loves becomes the same for it. And they do not ever cover up its ugliness and faults with self-satisfaction.

The state of withdrawal from the workaday world that you are in can only be followed by someone whose inner dimension—or we could say whose heart—is great. If someone lacks this, then it is better to stay in the world of means. We affirm concerning us—by the law of the folk—that our neediness should be greater than our reputation, but today, our reputation is greater than we are. May God remedy our ills!

Lastly, the one who does not want God's support to be cut off should refrain from speaking about the Way to any and all. Rather, he should speak about it only with those who are in it. *Peace.*

LETTER 113

Our Lord and Protector

ONE DAY, A MAN who was critical of the Sufi path said to me and a group of brethren, "You are our lords and protectors!"[237] I said to him, "I will not hear that from you or anyone else, nor accept it from anyone at all. God is my Lord and my Master, and so if this is said about myself, I neither hear it nor accept it." Then I went on: "But, when God—be He glorified—is my Lord and Master, I do become a lord of this creation and a protector of it despite myself, whether I like it or not, but when my ego becomes my lord and master, then all creation becomes my lord and master despite myself, whether I like it or not. All of it abases me, belittles me, lowers me, overwhelms me, disregards me, ignores me, and does with me whatever it wishes. So how can I give the least importance to your praise or your blame, or the praise and blame of another? That would make no sense at all." *Peace.*

---

[237] *Sādātunā wa muwālīnā.* This was said in jest or even mockingly.

LETTER 114

The man who kept quiet

ONE DAY I was involved in spiritual dialogue with my brothers ﵃ when a man sat down near us but acted as if he did not see us or hear us. So I said to him, speaking from a very powerful state that had come upon me, "Stand up or sit with us, may God be merciful to you, for our gathering is a gathering of forgiveness and mercy. Do not be apart from us as long as we are in a gathering, and in time you will see more and more. Come near to us, dear brother, and may your Lord be merciful to you and us both, and may He have mercy on all creatures by means of our gathering. But he who doubts what we say should not sit with us or even be near us." *Peace.*

LETTER 115

Silence

ONE DAY I was sitting in the zāwiya of the Shaykh ﵁, speaking with our brethren about silence, and encouraging them towards it. What I said to them, in a word, was: "Make silence one of the major practices your observe each day, one of the best and most important of them, because silence results in reflection, and 'one hour of reflection is more excellent than seventy years of worship,' as the *ḥadīth* I taught you states." At that moment, I was in a state of great intoxication and great sobriety, combining both, and powerful in both when one, of the scholars from among our brothers from Fes (may God protect it from all harm) broke out in mocking laughter. See what God did with him at the end of our letters, which recount some of the extraordinary things God brought to pass,[238] and it will gladden you and strengthen your certitude and love for the people of the Way. *Peace*

⁂

LETTER 116

Dig in one place

I WOULD LIKE you to give up love that is scattered because it will keep you from reaching the secret, goodness, virtue, and blessing. Someone who is sometimes attached to this, sometimes to that, and sometimes to something else is like someone searching for water who digs a little here, a little there, and a little over there. He will die of thirst before he ever reaches water. But someone who digs in one place, putting his trust in God and depending upon Him, will reach water, will drink from it, and will even have enough to give to [other thirsty] people—and God knows best. They say—by whom I mean the Sufis—"Stay with one door and all the doors will be opened for you. Submit to one Master, and all His servants will submit to you."

In a like manner, someone who longs sometimes for the East and travels east, and sometimes for the West and travels west, who sometimes abstains and sometimes indulges himself, will always be distant. Were he to find nearness, he would find peace, even as Sīdī ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān al-Majdhūb said:

> The day arose upon the moons
> And naught but my Lord remained.
> People go to visit Muḥammad
> While I dwell with him in my heart.

Peace.

---

[238] Letter 228.

LETTER 117

Avoiding pretenders

I STRONGLY CAUTION you to avoid mixing with the pretenders of our time and even speaking with them. If they speak to you and wish to engage you, there should be no response to them except silence.

Our master ﵁ said, "The real way to oppose the enemy is to be occupied with the love of the Friend. If you get involved with trying to oppose an enemy, then he achieves his goal and you lose the love the Friend." *Peace*

LETTER 118

Caution against conjecture (*ẓann*)

SOMEONE WHO STOPS with conjecture (*ẓann*) will never reach the truth. So rid yourself of conjecture, and make no judgment [about anything] based on it, or upon your own opinion—make no judgment until you personally ascertain the matter. Truth in word and deed will rid you of doubts and imaginings and establish on-going oneness in your heart. It will even rid you of the adversary in your own ego, and when you rid yourself of that adversary, you rid yourself of the adversary among men. When that one is gone, you have succeeded, and God will be your ally repelling the harm that might come from him towards servants, and then your time will have come. Such is the state of perfection for God's saints. *Peace*

LETTER 119

Some of the states of the Sufis

WEARING A COARSE woolen jellaba, begging, going without a head covering, walking barefoot, sitting on trash heaps (while avoiding impurities), eating in the marketplaces, and lying by the roadside are things which Sufis from our *Ṭarīqa* and others do in their various states. Whether they are done with truth or with vanity is only known to those who are themselves sincere, but we see that it is only the sincerity behind such acts that matters; otherwise, the true people of the Way are not concerned about themselves at all, nor do they choose for themselves one state over another, for they are drowned in the seas of Divine Immensity even as the great shaykh, Abū Saᶜīd ibn al-Aᶜrābī ؓ, said when asked about *al-fanā'*: "It is when the immensity and greatness [of God] appear to the servant causing him to forget this world and the Next...." etc. Before being drowned in this ocean (and God knows best), they may have followed those practices, for their sincerity did not let them look at anything except what was between them and their Lord, and as for what was between them and His creatures, they did not look upon it at all. Such was their state ؓ.

We see that the people of sincerity have many great, strange, and varied states which are not genuinely known except to the "Khiḍris" among people.[239] Look at the states of al-Khiḍr ؑ as mentioned in the God's Book and you will see something marvelous.[240] He caused a boat to sink with its owners in it and it was for their benefit. He slew a youth who had not himself slain anyone, neither from his people nor others, nor was there any legal reason for his death. He rebuilt a wall even while its owners would not offer him hospitality after he had asked them for it. He did all of that in the presence of a Messenger of God, the one to whom God spoke directly, our Lord Moses (upon whom and our Prophet be peace), who only accepted the exoteric truth and only acted in accordance with it. So understand—and may God allow you and us to understand. *Peace.*

LETTER 120

A small amount of devotion with the heart

EVEN IF, IN these times, people's devotional acts abound, they do not bear fruit. This is because the love of this world has taken up residence in their hearts and this world is what they live for and never leave. If they were content to do without it, as others have been, then the smallest amount of devotional practice—a tenth of a tenth of what they are doing—would suffice and its fruits would come to them as they have come to others. The smallest amount of devotions with the heart is better than mountains of devotions without. Practice by the heart is great even if the quantity is small, while practice by other than the heart is small, even if the quantity is great. Thus, the *Ḥikam* [45] states: "No deed arising from a renouncing heart is paltry; no deed arising from an avaricious heart is fruitful." *Peace.*

---

[239] People who have many of the characteristics of al-Khiḍr.

[240] See footnote 138.

⁂

LETTER 121

Majesty and Beauty

FOR THE PERFECTED saints, the Divine Majesty and the Divine Beauty are one. For them, Majesty is Essence and Beauty, Attributes. How could someone see them as separate who sees honor in lowliness, strength in weakness, giving in deprivation, blessing in distress, life in death, well-being in tribulation, the Beloved in the foe, and the great in the small?

Someone once said to the great master, Sīdī Dhū'l-Nūn al-Miṣrī ؓ, "Show me the Greatest Name," and he answered him, "Show me the smallest and I will show you the Greatest." This was because he had come to see only the majesty and greatness of God, and this Majesty is manifest in the hidden, and hidden in the manifest, and It is both manifestation and hiddenness. It is near in what is distant and distant in what is near, and It is both nearness and distance. It is high in what is low and low in what is high, and It is both height and lowliness. It is great in what is small, and small in what is great, and It is both greatness and smallness. It is strong in what is weak, and weak in what is strong, and It is both weakness and strength. It is the higher and the lower, the separated and united, and It is both separation and union. It is the part and the whole, differentiated into every possible mode whatever that mode might be, whatever that thing might be, whether above or below, high or low, articulate or not, silent or not, known or not:

My Beloved envelopes all Being!
He is manifest in the white and the black,
In the Christian and Jew, in the pig and the ape,
In the letters and the points....
Understand me well! Understand me!

... as the great saint Sīdī ᶜAlī al-Shushtarī said, may God benefit us by his blessing and the blessing of those like him. *Peace!*

⁂

LETTER 122

The marriage of the spirit and the self

THE SELF (*al-nafs*) and the spirit (*al-rūḥ*) are one and the same entity that comes from the very essence of light. It has two names only by virtue of two qualities: clarity and turbidity.[241] As long as the self exists in a state of turbidity, it can be called by no other name than *nafs*. But when the turbidity clears, it becomes a jewel-like essence (and is called) *rūh*. We also see that these two dimensions love one another since they are close to one another, and that there is goodness, beauty, proportion, and balance in both. When God wishes to take charge of the affairs of one His servants, He weds these two within him, which is to say He allows one to exert power over the other so that the soul returns from the desires which had taken hold of it, removed it from its kith and kin, and so completely robbed it of its virtues, beauties, splendor, nobility, sublimity, and its exaltation—all that its Lord had given it such that it even denied its own origin and refused to acknowledge it. It does not remain in this state, however, but rather leaves it and returns from it totally, and it is then that the Spirit comes into it, and sustains it with inspirations and mysteries which God gives to support it and which are themselves endless. To the measure that it abandons its desires is its support fortified from the direction of its Lord, and the marriages multiply as do their fruits: God-given knowledge and practices born of that knowledge. And the delight that comes from this only leads the one who experiences it to oppose his ego yet further and to push it towards things it dislikes, things which weigh heavily upon it, and which it finds distasteful—but all of this becomes easy [for the traveler] because of the lights, mysteries, and benefits he perceives in it. *Peace*

---

[241] See footnote 45.

LETTER 123

The way of inner and outer *tajrīd*

I SAID TO one of the scholars of Fes (may God shield it from all harm) who had criticized me for following the way of *tajrīd*, and considered it something objectionable and devoid of good: "The way of *tajrīd* for those who follow it is like the red elixir of the alchemists. Only someone who is ignorant of it and does not understand its value would disapprove of it." In his *Ḥikam* [2], the great shaykh, Sīdī Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh called it 'lofty aspiration,' when he said, 'Your desire to be detached from the world even though God has put you in the world to gain a living is a hidden passion, and your desire to gain a living in the world even though God has put you in a state of detachment from the world is a come down from a lofty aspiration.'[242] It is the way followed by Sīdī Abū Yazīd al-Basṭāmī, Sīdī Junayd, Sīdī Abū Yaᶜzā al-Maghribī, and Mawlānā ᶜAbd al-Salām ibn Mashīsh,[b] and many others like them رضي الله عنهم and it is only your ignorance of it that makes it appear to you as error—that, along with how few follow it in this our time, in which goodness is so rare and ugliness abounds. That it is rare among people is only because of how hard it is on the ego: in truth, no one can truly become detached from the workaday world and its trappings unless God takes him by the hand and grants him complete trust, or we could say complete dependence upon Him.

If you say, "Those who followed this way used to flee from other people and go live on mountains and in caves far from civilization," I would say that is what only a few of them used to do. Most of them did what we are doing now. I would also say that those who remain among people, in the marketplaces and elsewhere, but still break the habits of their egos, are stronger [than those who retreat to remote places], and the difference between them is great. Someone who isolates himself from people [for the sake of worshipping God] is, in fact, weak. The strong person is not someone who separates himself from people to be safe from them but rather, who stands in the wind—that is, with people—while the lamp of his heart continues to give light and is not blown out. If a person is inside a room with all the doors shut, and a gust of wind blows in, maybe his lamp will stay lit and maybe not, but he is certainly not like someone who stands in the wind, and yet whose lamp will not be blown out. So understand.

---

[242] See also the end of letter 57.

And if you say to me, "The situation is confusing to us and we do not know who is right and who is wrong," we would say that whoever wants to know this should have the best opinion of his Lord and of His Lord's servants,[243] even as the Prophet ﷺ said, "There are two character traits higher than all the rest: [having] the best opinion of God and the best opinion of God's servants. And there two character traits worse than all the rest: [having] a bad opinion of God and a bad opinion of God's servants." [244]

Also: by God, the person who truly profits—from the beginning of this world until its end—is the one who has a good intention, honesty, a good opinion [of God and His creatures], and acceptance in his heart; and the person who truly loses—from the beginning of the world to its end—is the one whom God has deprived of those qualities. A person who has good intention along with its sister virtues will profit even in a situation where everyone else is losing, not to mention in a situation where everyone profits, while a person who lacks good intention and lacks love will lose in a situation where everyone else is profiting, not to mention in a situation where everyone else is losing.

And if you ask, "Is there a path to our Lord other than the path of *tajrīd* that you follow? Is it not enough for us to be inwardly detached from the workaday world but not outwardly?" I would say that there is really no way for any of us to reach our Lord except through the door of leaving the world both outwardly and inwardly, for such was the Path of the Messenger of God ﷺ and of his Companions and all those who followed them in their way up to this present time. We cannot inwardly leave the world unless that renunciation appears on the limbs of our body. Otherwise, there is no value to it. The great shaykh, our master Sīdī ᶜAlī ؓ, said, "By *tajrīd* we mean to leave the workaday world physically, not just spiritually. The benefit of becoming spiritually detached from it cannot be attained until there is also a physical detachment. If spiritual detachment alone were possible, it would be something imperceptible, unnoticed, and have no affect on our judgment, nor hold any benefit until it became manifest in the physical realm: "I have been commanded to judge based what is outwardly apparent and leave God in charge of the secrets within."[245] It is by what is outwardly apparent that matters are affirmed or negated. Someone for whom the outward dimension affirms nothing has nothing, for the basis of the outward is what is within. Thus, the great shaykh Sīdī Abū Madyan ؓ, said: "Beware of anyone claiming some state with God but upon whom you see no outward evidence of that state."[246]

---

[243] See footnote 133.

[244] We were not able to find a source for this saying, although something similar to it appears in al-Ghazālī, *al-Iḥyā*, II:15.

If there could be a bond to the spiritual that did not involve the visible world, then it would be sufficient for the faithful to hold their beliefs in their hearts without pronouncing the two-fold testimony[247] with their tongues, but since connection to the spiritual is only by way of the physical, God has enjoined upon us the utterance of this testimony with our tongues. He enjoined upon us what He enjoined, and this is something clear to all.

We believe that if someone's heart becomes purified of the love of this world and from all that does not concern him, so will his limbs. Consider, my dear sir, the states of the Companions ؓ and others among the people of sincerity and you will see that their inward states were outwardly visible. Among them were those who had nothing of this world except the provision a rider could carry in his saddlebag, and others who had not even that. Whatever they found [to eat] they were satisfied with, and they did not choose for themselves, nor store up food for the future. This they did in imitation of the Messenger of God ﷺ and as a way to realize his virtues in themselves, for he had said, "Neither I nor the pious ones of my community have anything to do with *takalluf*."[248]

---

[245] This saying is sometimes quoted as a *ḥadīth*. Although there are many sound *ḥadīth* which substantiate it, the author of *Kashf al-khafā'* states for entry 585 that it is not itself a saying of the Prophet ﷺ but rather of Imam al-Shāfiᶜī.

[246] Cornell, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

[247] This is, the two-fold testimony, "There is no god but God and Muḥammad is the Messenger of God," (*lā ilāha illā Llāh, Muḥammadu(n)-r-Rasūlu-Llāh*) which is the first of the Five Pillars of the religion and which, when pronounced with correct intention and understanding before two witnesses makes someone a Muslim.

There were those Companions and others who had possessions and wealth in the world, but their hearts were so full of the love of God and His Messenger ﷺ that it did not harm them. On the contrary, it benefitted them for they used it to feed the hungry and clothe the naked, just as another *ḥadīth* states, "The world is a mount (*maṭiyya*) for the believer."[249] But this is not the case for each and every one, only for some.

Our shaykh, Sīdī ʿAlī ؓ, said, "We can no more avoid what our intentions (direct us towards) than we can avoid (passing) urine and feces, but when we are finished, we stand up and get back to work, and not one of us would stay in that spot a second longer than necessary. So it is with the world. When the believer has fulfilled his need of it, he should give it up and turn towards his Lord." It is not possible for anyone to turn towards his Lord except by turning his back on whatever else he was busying himself with instead of God, or as the great master, Sīdī Ibn ʿAṭā'illāh ؓ says, "When you turn towards God, you turn your back on creation, and when you turn towards creation, you turn your back on God." And our master رضي الله عنه said, "The sincere *faqīr* is someone whose foe can find no way to harm." This is the sign by which he is known: that his only occupation is with his Friend, and being busy with his Friend veils him from his foe, for the Friend and the foe will never combine.

---

[248] Al-ʿIraqī, in his sourcing of the *ḥadīth* mentioned in *Iḥyā ʿulūm al-dīn*, finds this saying questionable as a *ḥadīth*. It is, however, conveyed as such in the collection of Daraquṭnī, and the *ḥadīth* "We were prohibited *takalluf*" appears in Bukhārī.

Takalluf, a gerund of the verb *takallafa*, to undertake something or take responsibility for something, is generally taken to mean "ostentation or affectation." In the time of the Prophet ﷺ, it was originally associated with going to excess in hospitality towards guests, especially in quantities and varieties of food.

It also carries the meaning of "trying to take on more than is necessary," based on a well-know narration:" ʿUmar ؓ recited the verse *And fruits and herbage* (fākihatan wa abban) [80:310] and then said, 'The word *fākihatan* I know, but what is *abban*?' Then he said to himself, 'By your life, ʿUmar, this is *takalluf*!'"which in the context means to ask about something superfluous to practicing the religion.

[249] We were unable to find the source of this saying.

There is no doubt that if an aspirant arrives at the state of *tajrīd*, sincerity in his faith comes to him as well, and if not, not.

Tajrīd itself is to let something fall to ruin, and if the ruination of the mundane world, along with its ways and means and desires, does not appear in the life of the *faqīr*, then he is a little child, not a mature man. If it appears in his life and he takes up residence in that condition, then he is among the grown men, and it becomes a sign of his maturity, or we might say of his having reached his Lord. When the light within a believer grows strong, it expels all else, and when everything else is gone, his Lord (be He glorified and exalted) remains. Anyone who is like this is one of God's saints.

There is no proof for the one who speaks of inward detachment without speaking of outward detachment. To someone who tries to do this inwardly without doing so outwardly apply the words of God ﷿: *Grievously odious is it in the Sight of God that you say that which you do not do* [61:3], and other like verses, while to someone who practices only outward detachment apply the words of God ﷿: *They say with their tongues what is not in their hearts* [48:11].

When the aspirant is free of the illusion of what is other than God, then he takes and is not taken, overcomes and is not overcome, pulls and is not pulled, owns and is not owned, and so forth. In that state, there is no harm whether he practices *tajrīd* outwardly or not. It is amazing that our Prophet ﷺ died without ever having put one brick upon another, while the learned of our time (may God be kind to them and us) do not accept the state of someone neglecting the world at all, but accept the state of the builder. Few of them accept *tajrīd*, even though the great imam, al-Junayd رضي الله عنه was among those who practiced it, as were the great masters Sīdī Abū Yaʿzā and Sīdī Abū al-Yazīd al-Basṭāmī,[b] and besides them about four thousand others. All of them gave up the workaday world and its trappings and donned the patched robe and all of them are examples and have a great place before God and His servants. Indeed, they were nearly prophets themselves. Yet (the scholars of today) do not accept what we are doing and will not even hear about it let alone practice it. But really, if we do not take people such as those as examples, what people should we take?

Such is the ego: corrupt, proud, and tyrannical. By God, by God, by God—only the one whom God strengthens is strong enough to oppose its desires, and only the one truly devoted to his Lord is able to protect his soul.

The Prophets (God's blessings and salutations of peace be upon them) and the saints رضي الله عنهم devoted themselves neither to withdrawing from the world, nor to working in the world, nor to any other thing great or small, even the gardens of Paradise. Rather, they devoted themselves to their Lord. Their vision of the True Sovereign had effaced them seeing anything else. So how could they remain either with the world or with *tajrīd* or with anything else when they were perpetually drowned in this vision and perceived neither hardship nor ease, poverty nor wealth, health nor sickness? May God honor us by their mention and extinguish us in their love! *Peace*

LETTER 124

Receiving the litany

ONCE I HEARD a certain learned man from among our brethren in Fes (may God shield it from all harm) say, "Religious knowledge has become ever more detailed because the world has lasted as long as it has." It seemed to me [at the time] that he was right, but then, after reflecting more upon it, I found that my view was actually quite different. I believe, dear brother, that the only reason religious knowledge has become ever more detailed is because there are so few people who have really listened. If those who heard it had been truly present, its expression would have been very succinct.

There was a certain person who kept insisting that I impart to him the litany, and so finally I did. Sometime later, it occurred to me to ask him whether he was maintaining it or not, for he seemed to me to be the same as he had been before I gave him the litany. So I asked, "Are you invoking or not?" and he answered that he was. Then I said to him, "The one who is invoking is not hidden from us, for the Supreme Name has a strong effect and well-known virtues. It is the Sultan of names and does not leave the one who invokes it in the state he had previously had. If he is truly a human being, it transports him from his state. Only if he is an animal does it leave him where he was. Of course, this means that the invoker is pure in his body, his clothes, and the place he sits, that his stomach is empty of what is forbidden, and that his tongue is clean of lies."

Then I said to him, "I was inspired toward the invocation of my Lord without any intermediary—purely by the grace of God (be He glorified!), there is no god besides Him! I would invoke the Name of the Invoked One night and day without let up, and I would recite the Qur'ān and flee from heedless people as if I were fleeing from enemies—and may God be a warrant for what we say. I did not want anyone to distract me from the invocation of my Lord, even my father, my mother, my brother, uncle, friend, or anyone else.

At that time, there was a teacher, Sīdī Muḥammad ibn ᶜAlī al-Lajjā'ī, who wanted me to take as a master a certain man of that time. Both of us were without a shaykh, and he loved me with a great love because he was one of my teachers of Qur'anic recitation. I said to him when he pressed me to go with him to the master he was thinking of: 'If I go with you and take him as a shaykh as you have, what benefit will I receive from him? The Prayer, recitation of the Qur'ān, invocation, isolation from people, practices that the people of the outward keep? But I am already doing those things constantly, praise be to God! What benefit can I receive from him? If it concerns outward practice, there are many people like him, and if concerns the inward, then I have not heard of anyone from among the people of our time [with this knowledge], and even if I do not know them directly, I know their disciples, and by God, they are no closer to God than most people, and as for gnosis (*al-maᶜrifa*), they have none, and if their masters had it, so would they. But it is gnosis that I am truly seeking.' That was my state until God opened for me the means by which I came to know my master and he took my hand (may God Most High suffice him always).

How is it then, my dear brother, that you do not invoke unless I tell you to do so? Are you like an animal that will not walk unless it is goaded? Someone who is always with the invokers has no need of anyone to tell him to invoke because he has two eyes and two ears. As people say, 'The ignorant man follows; the wise man is followed.' All he needs is someone to conduct him through the stations of invocation, from invocation by the tongue to invocation by the heart."

⁂

LETTER 125

Following a shaykh

LISTEN, O *faqīr*, to this story. Remember it, do not forget it, and keep it in mind when you are with the people of the Way—may God take you by the hand. I was hosting a group of visitors from among some brothers from the region of Tāza[250] who had taken me as a shaykh before that visit. [When the visit was over], two of them came to me and said, "We two have decided to return by way of Fes."

I said to them, "But it would be better and safer for you to return with your brothers, for there is blessing is in the group."

They said, "We want to buy some pails there."[251]

I said, "This is the time when the Ḥājj[252] is going to travel and his route is the same route you would take [to Tāza]. He has pails, ewers, and cooking pots so you can buy everything you need from him."

They said, "But we have made the intention to return only by the route through Fes."

I replied, "Did you not say that I am your shaykh?."

They said, "Certainly!"

---

[250] Taza is a town about 100 miles southeast of the Shaykh's zāwiya in Bani Zarwāl. Going through Fes would have made the journey back considerably longer.

[251] *Sṭīylāt* are small pails, often used for the ablution. In the shaykh's time they would have been made of hammered copper.

[252] A merchant they all knew called "the Ḥājj," a common term of respect in Morocco for an older man.

I said, "Then you need to relinquish some of your will to me. To relinquish your will to the shaykh is actually to relinquish it to God, and to relinquish your will to God is the state of greatest saints. This is why the famous shaykh and saint, Abū Ja^{c}far al-Ḥaddād—he was the master of Junayd ﵁—said, 'For forty years I have desired only to desire to give up what I desired, and I have not found what I desired!' And another master of the Way said, 'For forty years, God has never placed me in a state that I disliked nor brought me from it to another state for which I was angered.'[253] And the great shaykh, Sīdī al-Sharīshī, said in his Qaṣīda in *Rā'*:

> If to give up your will is not part of your character,
> Then do not hope to smell the perfume of *faqr*.[254]

After having said all that to them, I said "Learn from me and listen. There was a certain man who would not stop asking me to give him the litany, so I did. Then he said to me, 'I would like to go to my land (or such and such a land),' and I replied, 'No sooner do you come in than you want to leave? That may have been possible before you took me as a shaykh, but now I will choose for you, not you.' Another came to me and the same thing happened with him as it had with the one before him, neither more nor less, and I said this same thing to each of them and to anyone who resolves to follow the Ṭarīqa at the hands of one of its shaykh, may God be pleased with them and benefit us by their blessing." *Peace.*

---

[253] This saying is attributed to Abū ^{c}Uthmān al-Jabrī (also called al-Ḥīrī) in *al-Risālat al-Qushayriyya*. Knish, *op. cit.*, page 45.

[254] The meaning of these verses is that if someone is not prepared to relinquish some of his own will upon the advice of his shaykh, he or she will not realize what it means to be a *faqīr*, one who is empty for God. It is worth pointing out, however, that the shaykh was asking very little of these men from Taza: only to take a route home that was both safer and shorter.

LETTER 126

Respect for the shaykh

THE *FAQĪR* WHO truly wants to follow the Ṭarīqa should be a servant to its people. He should be in their company only as someone ready to fulfill their needs, at least to the extent that he can, since the Prophet ﷺ said, "Neither I nor the pious people of my community have anything to do with *takalluf*."[255] If he seeks to be their companion or to be nearer to them, and yet does not offer the obligatory Prayers with them or even in the mosque where they pray, and does not sit with them in their circle of invocation, then it is sure that he will appear diminished in their eyes, for only an offensive person would act in such a way. Instead, he should try to recognize what benefits he receives from them and what does not benefit so as not to be a useless person who is unaware of his uselessness. When he does this, his inner reality will grow luminous, not dark, and he will have taken the Ṭarīqa as it truly is. He will know its Law and observe it—for the Truth without the Law is incomplete just as the Law without the Truth is incomplete, whereas true realization rests in joining the two. Then, if a state of intoxication comes to him and removes him from the world of his senses, and he does not hide this from people, his inner reality will remain illuminous even if he contravenes the Law[256] and even while the perfect state combines intoxication and sobriety. If someone passes away from his senses, as we have mentioned, and the cause is ignorance or heedlessness, then it does not benefit him. He must know it and be aware of it and act upon it. And if the cause is inability, or laziness, or pride, or lack of attention—and that is a door that is always a possibility for those travelling to God—then let him examine his own heart. There is no value in someone leaving his family, his job, his friends, and his homeland to be with the people of the Way unless he also gives up being around people only to chat with them about worldly things. Such a state is of no use, although there are plenty of people in it and they even have followers. They change from moment to moment. Sometimes their souls tell them to remain with a teacher, sometimes to give him up and take someone else, and this goes on until they die without having gained anything except doubt (and we seek refuge in God from that!). If they could but maintain what I have said with fervor, not play, then God would take them by the hand, for He has said, *Were they true to God, it would be better for them* [47:21], better than someone whose shaykh says one thing and he says the opposite and considers his own view of something to be better than his shaykh's, or someone who disputes the word of his shaykh and shakes his hand face to face, as what happened with one of our brothers.[257] I was with some of our brethren رضي الله عنهم when I said to them "The path of the dawn is the path of the sun," and one of them said to me (may God forgive him), "What is this stuff you're saying? Where's the proof?" For someone like this, there is no remedy except something akin to getting seized by the *makhzan* and taught a lesson.[258] Then we might hope for some good from him. May God grant me and our brothers His accord. Amen! *Peace*

---

[255] See footnote 248.

[256] There could be a situation, for example, when someone were so overwhelmed by a spiritual state that he or she could not offer the prayer. In that state, the person is not considered *taklīf*, legally responsible. Any Prayers or similar obligations missed, however, would need to be made up after the state passes.

⁂

LETTER 127

Placing our hardships in the Hands of God

FOR EVERY CRAFT, there needs to be a recognized master. Otherwise, it is mostly in vain. Listen to a story that affirms what I say, and may God grant you and us His accord.

There was a certain learned person who knew many of the spiritual masters of his time and had received litanies from them all, and yet even so, whenever he was with me, he would complain to me about the debts he had accrued and how his situation had become exceedingly narrow because of them. One day I said to him, "Listen to what I have to say to you, follow it always, and you will see marvels. In a time of adversity, both good and evil are present, never absent, and near, never far. If at that time you invoke your Lord and forget yourself, you will profit, and otherwise, you will lose. Whenever times of need come and overshadow you, occupy yourself with the means that your Lord has enjoined upon you and pay no attention to anything else. Be that way always when a time of difficulty comes your way, and evil will leave you and good will come your way. If you give up your will to your Lord in times of need, or hardship, or tribulation, and you do not seek to help yourself by any secondary means you have, that is the greatest station and above it there is no higher station except Prophethood."

---

[257] Generally, it is a sign of respect to the shaykh or any learned person to bow the head or at least lower the gaze when shaking hands.

[258] *Al-makhzan* in Moroccan Arabic signifies the authorities, generally those attached to the palace.

After listening to this, he said to me (may God be kind to him), "I have such-and-such invocations—maybe a thousand! Some of them I received from Shaykh so-and-so, and some I got from Shaykh so-and-so...." and he went on like this until he had mentioned a great number of the masters of his time. I said to him, "Listen to what I have told you, follow it, and you will see marvels: a true shaykh is the one who teaches you what I have taught you, and may God curse anyone who would lie to you!" *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 128

Do not defend yourself; let God defend you

I URGE YOU in the strongest terms to occupy yourselves with your Lord and not concern yourselves with anyone who wants to take you away from that. If you do not try to help yourselves [against that kind of person], God Most High will help you and will take charge of the matter, whereas if you try to help yourselves and take charge of it, He will leave it on your shoulders and you will be powerless to do anything, while He, be He glorified, has power over all things.

Also know that if you are able to gain mastery over your souls, you will gain mastery over anyone who might wish to harm you and mastery over all creation as well (and God knows best), for no one masters people unless he has mastered his own ego, nor will his adversary among people leave him until he is freed from the adversary of his own ego, which is only possible by opposing his desires and obeying his

Lord. If you have gained mastery over yourselves, as I have said, you gain mastery over people and the entire world, and all will be under your power and control to do with as you please.

Beware of being ignorant or of being ignorant of your own ignorance, which is compound ignorance, so that you believe you have mastery over something when you do not even have mastery over yourselves. By God, that can never be. True, if you master your own selves, God will give you mastery over all creation, as we have said to you, for He (be He glorified) is the Generous One, and His generosity is immense. No one of us is generous to Him with our own selves—which is to say, no one of us gives of himself for God's sake—without His being generous with His Sublime Self in return. Whenever we give to Him of our sinful and faulty selves, He gives to us of His precious Self in return: He covers our lowliness with His sublimity, our poverty with His wealth, our weakness with His strength, our ignorance with His knowledge, our anger with His clemency, our powerlessness with His power, and so forth. Or if you prefer, you may say He covers our attributes with His Attributes and our traits with His Traits. How marvelous a Sovereign Who purchases from us with His own Self what He already owns, while we sell to Him what is really nothing. By God, by God before Whom we are ashamed. In reality, who can even hear this let alone do it? But hear what our Lord ﷻ says to the one of us who gives freely of himself for His sake: 'Are you trying to be generous to Me, O My servant, when generosity belongs to Me and I belong to it? Here is My Self in your self.' *Peace.*

LETTER 129

Drawing near to the Prophet ﷺ

I URGE YOU to draw near to your Prophet frequently by means of the invocation of blessings and salutations of peace upon him, as we have said to you before. We see that this invocation of blessings and peace only render their spiritual reality to someone who is following the Prophet's ﷺ *sunna*[259] and who brings his character into conformity with the Prophet's ﷺ character. Many people invoke blessings upon him ﷺ constantly and yet are swimming in darkness because they are ignorant of his *sunna* and have based their character upon innovation. So beware of that deep pit, avoid it, and may God deliver you and us from falling into it. *Peace.*

---

[259] See footnote 40 on the Shaykh's use of the word *sunna*.

LETTER 130

Being in contact with the Shaykh

FOR THERE TO be a spiritual connection between you and us, there needs to be a physical connection, which means you need to be physically near us if possible. If not, then at least you should visit us, even if only once a month, so that there can be a link between your spirit and ours. *Peace*

LETTER 131

Caution against breaking norms in ways that contravene the Law

YOU NEED TO look very carefully at the things you have been doing in for the purpose of breaking with norms, for they are surely going to remove you from the *sunna* and put you closer to dangerous innovation, and that would be a tribulation. Instead, you should break your normal habits only by what is heavy for the ego, and certainly by nothing which the Law forbids or considers disliked.[260]

Concerning the saying of Sīdī Abū'l-ᶜAbbās Aḥmad Zarrūq ؓ, "As long as something is not strongly disapproved of… [it is permissible to do]," I would say that in a time [like ours] when things [which God loves] are so few and when disapproved of things are so many, when followers are so few and adversaries are so many, it is not fitting for us to follow what he said. And God Most High says, *Say, "If you love God, follow me, and God will love you …* [3:31]."

---

[260] It is impossible to know precisely what the shaykh is talking about, but it appears that he is writing to certain disciples who were trying to break their normal habits by something unconventional but which they also enjoyed doing.

I counsel you to maintain the obligatory practices and what is essential of the *sunna,* and not to follow any path whatsoever without knowledge, for the Prophet ﷺ said, "It is not lawful for a believing person to proceed with anything until he knows the rule of God concerning it."[261] Sīdī Abū Sulaymān al-Darānī ﵁ said, "Anyone who is thinking even about doing something good should wait until he hears what has been conveyed concerning it." And as we have said, the one who knows is not like the one who is ignorant, even as God Most High says, *"Are those who know and those who do not know equal?"* [39:9] "*... or are darkness and light equal?"* [13:16]. And as we have said before this, the one who knows what he is doing is not like the one who does not. I have seen many aspirants and others accomplishing a great many good actions and without knowing they are doing them, and accomplishing a great many bad actions without knowing they are doing them. The inner nature of such people is benighted, not illuminated, while the inner nature of someone who knows what he is doing and is careful not to violate the commandment of his Lord is illuminated, not benighted.

Surely knowledge is light and ignorance is darkness. Knowledge is a day, ignorance a night. As proof of the nobility of knowledge in its sublimity and transcendence, it is enough for us to know that it is one of the attributes of God Most High, as the Prophet ﷺ conveyed to us, reporting the words of his Lord be He glorified, "I am Knowing and I love those who are knowing."[262] There is no goodness in someone who does not learn this knowledge or at least acknowledge its value, for our Lord is neither known nor worshipped except by knowledge, and the Prophet ﷺ said, "Every deed which is not based on what we have enjoined is refused."[263] The Muhammadan *sunna*, dear brethren, is the way, as the illustrious master, Sīdī al-Buṣīrī ﷺ, said in his *Burda*:

---

[261] This appears to be an oft-stated principal rather than an actual saying of the Prophet ﷺ.

[262] This is, in all likelihood, from a narration, "God spoke to Moses ﵇ by inspiration and said ... ." It is mentioned in the introduction to al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's gloss of *Nūr al-īḍāḥ,* a well-known work on Ḥanafī *fiqh* by Shurnubulālī, in speaking of the excellence of knowledge.

> He has called people to Allah, so those who cling to him
> Are clinging to a rope which will never break.

and

> You never see a friend of his unaided by him
> Nor yet an enemy of his undefeated.[264]

and other similar things. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 132

Contemplation

CONTEMPLATION IS SPIRITUAL insight and spiritual insight can only be held on to by way of the physical world and can only be sustained by way of spiritual dialogue,[265] visiting [the saints], and breaking the routines of the ego. Whenever you settle complacently into one state, contemplation ceases. So do not cease to move, to accomplish the practice, or we might say, "the means."[266] for that is the way the contemplative state is strengthened. My master ﷺ used to always tell me, "Spiritual insight is of a very subtle nature. If a person is not careful, it will escape from his hands while he is unaware." *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 133

Seeing God in all things

THERE IS NOTHING in existence except God Most High. *All things perish, save His Face* [28:88]; *All that is upon (the earth) passes away. And*

---

[263] This is a variant wording of the well-known *ḥadīth* found in Bukhārī, Muslim, and other main sources, "He who performs an act (in religion) which is not founded on what I have enjoined is rejected."

[264] *The Burda*, Spiker, *op. cit.* lines 37 and 136.

[265] See letter 92 concerning what the Shaykh means by this.

[266] "Means" here refer to physical acts of worship, including sessions of invocation, which can render someone receptive to spiritual insight.

there remains the Face of your Lord, Possessed of Majesty and Bounty [55:27]; *That is God, your true Lord. What is there beyond truth but error?* [10:32]; *That is because God is the Truth and what they call upon apart from Him is false* [22:62]; *Say, "Truth has come, and falsehood has vanished. Truly falsehood is ever vanishing"* [17:81]; *Say, "Allāh," then leave them to play at their vain discourse* [6:91]; *He is the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward* [57:3]. And the Prophet ﷺ said, "I have seen nothing without seeing God in it."[267] May God pardon us, but truly it is impossible to see our Lord while seeing something besides Him, as all the people of realization have affirmed, but only one with his foot on the path knows this.

> Since I came to know God, I see no other
> —for us that "other" is forbidden.
> Since I was united, I fear no separation
> and today I have wholly arrived.

This means (and God knows best) that since I have come to know my Lord with the knowledge of the people of contemplation and direct vision, not the people of textual proofs and evidence, I have ceased to see anything but Him in all things, as the Prophet ﷺ did. And the words, "since I was united, I fear no separation and today I have wholly arrived." mean (and God knows best) that since I have seen unity in multiplicity, I have ceased to be afraid of seeing multiplicity in unity, which was my state before I witnessed my Lord in all things. Without a doubt, there is nothing in existence except God, but illusion veils us from this vision, and illusion is something without substance. The great master, Sīdī Ibn ʿAṭā'illāh, says in his *Ḥikam*, "And if the veil of illusion were rent, there would be an essential vision that would make all other vision vanish, and the light of certitude would dawn and cover all creation."[268] And as our master Sīdī al-Majdhūb said,

> My vision vanished in His vision
> and I was effaced from all ephemeral things.
> I affirmed I could find none other than God
> And at peace in my state, I passed the night.

---

[267] This is usually considered a saying of one of the saints.

[268] We were unable to find this is the present edition of the *Ḥikam*.

So do not imagine that there is anything that exists along with God. There is nothing with God other than God as all the people of realization agree, but none knows this except someone whose foot is on the path. And do not hate the egoistic thoughts and their forces which might come over you and pile up in your heart.[269] Rather, surrender your will concerning yourselves to your Lord at that moment. Be still, motionless, relaxed and not constricted. If you are able, sleep your fill, for sleep in times of adversity has the same benefit as breaking your routine and is also a form of surrender to God. Anyone who surrenders his entire will to his Lord, God will take by the hand. Do not hate egoistic thoughts that might come to you, but rather be as we have said and you will profit. Such thoughts are indeed a means by which Divine Oneness comes to reside in your hearts; by them do doubts and illusions depart, by them is the journey undertaken, by them is goodness attained, by them do tribulations end, and by them comes deliverance. So do not become overly concerned with impediments—or we might say obstacles—along the way, for God has empowered the expert with the means to shorten your path if you follow what we have said to you.

A *faqīh* said to me, "I am plagued by desires." I said to him, "For me, they have been a benefit. In fact, I have nothing except God's grace to me and the grace of those desires, and by God we will not forget their help."[270] The people of gnosis do not flee from things the way others do, for they contemplate their Lord in all things. Others flee because their perception of created beings veils them from perceiving the One Who brings them into being. The people of gnosis, however, are veiled from created beings by their perception of the One Who brings them into being. About this Sīdī Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh said in his *Ḥikam* [115], "The devotees and the ascetics are alienated from everything only because of their absence from God in everything. Had they contemplated Him in everything, they would not have been alienated from anything."

Listen to what happened to one of our brothers. He was walking along the road with some people from a certain Sufi order when a vision of the Creator veiled him from creation, and about everything he saw and heard, he began saying to those with him, "That is nothing. That is other than God!" If he heard people talking, or birds singing, or animals, or the wind or anything else, he would say to those who were with him, "That is nothing," and they marveled at his words.

---

[269] To react to such thoughts with hatred is to give them too much power.

[270] That is, to the extent that having such desires can bring someone back to God.

Similar to this is what happened to a certain [Sufi] in Alexandria when a crow cawed above him, and he answered, "I am here, O God, at your service!"[271] They punished him by parading him through the streets because he had addressed a creature as Pre-existent and Endless, and God forbid that this should be applied to anyone except our Lord.

Know (may God be merciful to you) that there is no obstacle between us and the vision of our Lord except our egoistic desires. So do not say that it is creation which veils us from the Creator. No, the only thing that veils us is illusion born of ignorance. If we knew, our knowledge would yield certitude, and that certitude would remove from our hearts and souls the vision of otherness. That is its role. If the veil of illusion were rent, essential vision would remove all other forms of sight, and the light of certitude would dawn and cover all created beings.

Listen to what happened to a certain disciple in the year 1183 AH.[272] His vision had become so intense that he decided that he needed to mix with heedless people and to hear them chattering about other people just so that he could find some relief [from the power of his state], or we might even say so that he could weaken it. But this only caused his vision becoming ever more intense, so much so that he was on the verge of losing his senses. So he fled [from them] and sought refuge in his Lord. In fact there are many whose visions were only strengthened when they tried to go back to the pastimes and desires they had had in their days of heedlessness. [In the case of this man], God wished to make him one of the people of sobriety. That is what he became and such is his life even now (may God be kind to him and those who love him). Amen!

Contemplation is by way of our inner vision, not our physical sight, and anyone who claims that it is the existence of created things which keeps him from this vision has no real knowledge of what it is. Nothing keeps us from it except illusion, and illusion is without substance. If it left us, we would find in all things a means to God. In fact, there is no means to Him except Him: "I came to know my Lord by my Lord, and were it not for my Lord, I would not know my Lord."[273] And the great Shaykh Sīdī Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh says in his *Ḥikam*: "When did You become so absent that You are in need of a proof giving evidence of You? And when did You become so distant that it is created things themselves that lead us to You?"[274] Also, "He did not establish for you created beings in order for you to see them, but rather in order for you to see their Lord within them,"[275] and there are many other such sayings. *Peace.*

---

[271] *Labayka, Allāhumma, labayk* is the invocation recommended for the pilgrims to say aloud as soon as they approach Mecca.

[272] 1769 CE.

LETTER 134

Trials

FOR THE PEOPLE of gnosis and love, it is inevitable that there will be someone placed in a position of power over them who will seek to harm them. *[That is] the wont of God that came to pass aforetime; and you will find no alteration in the wont of God* [48:23]. Great harm has been done to God's saints: some have been imprisoned, some have been flogged, some have been publically ridiculed,[276] and some have been killed. It is enough for us or anyone else to mention in this context the death of the spiritual Pole, our master ᶜAbd al-Salām ibn Mashīsh and the death of Sīdī al-Ḥallāj and others ﵄, the death of the Companions ﵄, and the death of [certain of the] Prophets (God's blessings and salutations of peace be upon them), even as God Most High says: *How many a prophet had many devoted men fight alongside him! They did not then falter in the face of what befell them in the way of God, nor did they weaken, nor did they demean themselves. And God loves the patient* [3:146].

---

[273] This saying is attributed to Dhū'l-Nūn al-Miṣrī in the *Risālat al-Qushayriyya*. Knysh, *op. cit.*, p. 323.

[274] From the 19th of the *munājāt* (intimate discouses) which end the *Ḥikam*.

[275] From *Laṭā'if al-minan*. See Dar al-Maᶜārif edition, p. 50, and in Roberts, p. 48.

[276] Literally, "led around," that is, through the streets on a donkey.

We also see that the harm suffered by the Prophets (God's blessings and salutations of peace be upon them) was worse than that which touched the Companions ﵃, and that theirs, in turn, was worse than what befell other saintly people. All this concerns spiritual stations, even as the best of people ﷺ said, "Those most sorely tried are the prophets, then the saints, then those who are like them, then those who are like them."[277] Certainly this was in no way because God neglected or distained them. On the contrary, this was by His generosity, grace, and benefaction. It was, in fact, a great gift.

Know too, as we have said many times: if you gain mastery over your own self, God will give you mastery over those who would harm you, be they human, or others. In fact, He will give you mastery over all creation. [Inversely], no one has mastery over all creation except the one who has mastery over himself. We could just as well say that no one is delivered from the outward adversary except the one who is delivered from the inward adversary, and no one is free from that except the one who can oppose his desires and follow his Lord with sincere and complete obedience. If you wish for God to take you by the hand, surrender to Him your entire will in respect to yourself. He will take charge of your life just as He took charge of the lives of others and grant you every opening such that you will have no more doubts concerning this. *Peace*

⁂

LETTER 135

The fruit of invocation

WHEN THE BELIEVER is constantly remembering God, saying, "*Allāh, Allāh, Allāh…*" he attains nearness to God, honor from God, and help from God. The source of virtue itself is to empty the heart of the love of this world. *Peace.*

---

[277] See footnote 223.

⁂

LETTER 136

Surrendering to the Divine decree

ONLY SOMEONE WITH no sense tries to oppose the Divine Will. The intelligent person does not. So do not grieve over a state you do not have, nor rejoice over one that you do. Rather, choose what your Lord chooses for you, be it gain or loss, giving or withholding, honor or lowliness, health or sickness, vastness or narrowness, expansion or contraction, wealth or poverty, height or depth, life or death… and so forth. Such is the state of those who surrender to their Lord, and of those who want to be one of them, and to meet them, and be in their company. As for the one who wants to choose other than what God has chosen, who wants other than what God wants—he stays a prisoner of his desires, and may God curse the liar.

> Surrender to Salma and go where she goes;
> Follow the winds of destiny and turn where they turn.

This is what we would like you to cling to and vie with one another to attain, for it is the goal of the path, and the highest form of realization. Lastly, only the one who stays calm in the face of trials can be said to be truly free of desires. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 137

Being with creation and being with the Creator

THERE IS A vast difference between the one whose heart is with the Creator and one whose heart is with creation. For the one whose heart is with the Creator, creation is in his grasp and responsive to his command and his control, whereas for the one whose heart is with creation, both he and his heart are in the grasp of creation and under its command. It is always in control of him, always ridiculing him, always trying him, and no one escapes from this state except the one whom God, in His grace, rescues. Otherwise, he dies a prisoner in its hands.

Even so, there are people who lead mundane lives which distract and remove them from God and yet who have only praise for the state they are in and blame for the way of *tajrīd* which would take them out of it … And there is no strength nor power but through God! *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 138

A question in the Qarawiyyin Mosque

ONE DAY I had prayed the obligatory Prayer in the Qarawiyyin mosque at a time when everyone there was involved in some type of worship. Some were offering the Prayer, some were reciting the Qur'ān, some were relating *ḥadīth*, some were studying, some were reciting *Dalā'il al-khayrāt*, and so forth. Seated near me was a man who claimed to be among the elect. I knew him because he had been attached to the shaykh I was with, but the world had robbed him of the beauty of spiritual poverty, and left him with nothing but pretense. It had cut him off from the shaykh and from me, and left him among the lowest of people. Upon completing the Prayer, I asked him, "Are these people those who remember God or those who are heedless?" He was unsure of how to answer me for a moment because he understood that the question was also about himself, but finally he said, "It seems to me only that they remember God," answering in such as way that would exonerate himself. So I said, "There are those who are remembering God among the heedless, and those who are heedless among the rememberers because they do what you can see of their religious practices but at the same time have ten times more worldly means.[278] They are thus poverty-stricken from two directions: from the direction of this world and the direction of the Next. They lack both because they are still not at peace with their Lord. If they remembered Him—or I might say, if they truly worshipped Him—they would find peace in Him and troubles would depart from them, for when the remembrance of God is present, troubles go, whereas when troubles are present, the remembrance goes and anyone who says they can exist simultaneously is ignorant of the true nature of remembrance, and unaware of its power, its mystery, and degree. The remembrance of God possesses such power and mystery that even the great terror of Judgment Day will not grieve those who have found their peace in it, let alone the trials and tribulations of this worldly abode. But where is the remembrance or worship of someone drowning in an ocean of doubts and illusions? By God, we do not see in him anything. *Peace*

---

[278] The word "means (*al-asbāb*)" may be applied to religious and spiritual practices or ways of earning a living.

⁂

LETTER 139

Sanctity (*al-walāya*) and the saint (*al-walī*)

SANCTITY IS A noble and divine condition, a sublime and lofty degree. It is [also] hard for most people's minds to grasp, and only the strongest and most subtle of them manage to do so (may God not leave the world empty of them!). And how could it be otherwise when the saint (*al-walī*) is the one whose life has been taken over (*tawallāhu*) by God, such that He has covered his attributes with His Attributes, and his traits with His Traits. That is to say, God has covered the saint's impotence with His Power, his weakness with His Strength, his neediness with His Richness, his lowliness with His Might, his ignorance with His Knowledge, and so forth. No one should be ignorant of this rank nor unaware to those who have been granted it. Rather, it is extremely important that [the disciple] know these things in order that both his aspiration and heart might be elevated.

We see that most people believe that there are two qualities which predominate in the saints above all others. One is that they are ecstatic, seized by the Divine attraction, and therefore without any methodic practice, and also that they are ascetics following a path of great spiritual effort. The reality, however, is not how people understand it. Divine attraction is a form of sanctity that does not combine with the way of asceticism. It is one kind of spiritual strength and asceticism is another kind, but strength does not come from both directions [simultaneously]. We have said this a number of times in hopes that someone will hear us, follow what we have to say, and profit.

Also, attraction (*al-jadhb*) is Truth that intoxicates, while method is

Law that is sobering. If the Truth dominates someone's soul, he will be veiled from the Law, and if the Law dominates someone's soul, he will be veiled from the Truth, or as the *Ḥikam* of Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh states:

"[The second type is] the possessor of a spiritual reality who, by contemplating the True King, is absent from mankind, and who, by contemplating the Cause of effects, is extinguished from the effects. He is a servant brought face to face with Reality, the splendor of which is apparent in him. A traveler in the Path, he has mastered its extent, except that he is drowned in lights and does not perceive created things. His inebriety prevails over his sobriety, his union over his separation, his extinction over his permanence, and his absence over his presence."[279]

Here [he mentions the case] of our Lady Āᶜisha[b] ﵂ who was in such a state of spiritual intoxication that she was not conscious [of creation], for she said, "By God, I will give thanks only to God."[280] except that she again became sober and returned to the perfect state that she had been in, the union of intoxication and sobriety, of the Law and the Truth, of attraction and method, the outward and the inward, presence and absence, for this is the state of the perfected ones ﵃. Thus, Sīdī Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh goes on to say:

"[The third is] the servant who is more perfect than [the second]. He drinks, and increases in sobriety; he is absent and increases in presence; his union does not veil him from his separation, nor does his separation veil him from his union; his extinction does not divert him from his permanence, nor does his permanence divert him from his extinction. He acts justly towards everyone and gives everyone his proper due."[281]

Many saints, in fact, have been so spiritually intoxicated that they lost consciousness of creatures. The great saint Sīdī Abū Zayd ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān al-Fāsī,[b] known as a gnostic in God, said, "I committed to memory fourteen bodies of knowledge and when I attained the knowledge of the Truth, all of them left me and nothing remained except the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth.*" As for me, when I attained what Sīdī ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān mentioned, there was taken from me everything in which I had found pleasure, the love of every friend I had been close to, every appetite I had hungered after, every delight which I had enjoyed, and I was taken away from all my habits and all my desires, such that my heart found nothing in which to repose except God, and even if I reposed somewhere physically, inwardly my sufficiency was with my Lord, praise and thanks be to God!

---

[279] Danner, *Ḥikam*, Second Treatise, p. 114.

[280] Q. 24:12 refers of the incident of the lost necklace when gossip started which seemed to impinge on the honor of Āᶜishā' ﵂ and a Qur'anic revelation came which affirmed her innocence, upon which her father, Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq ﵁, said to her, "Give thanks to the Messenger of God..." and she responded as quoted above.

[281] Danner, *ibid*. The last sentence is found in a number of *ḥadīth*, notably the advice of Salmān al-Farisī to Abū'l-Dardā'i (in Bukhārī) about avoiding excesses in ascetic practices.

When Sīdī Junayd was granted this station, he wrote:

Purify yourself with the water of the Unseen if you have the
  Secret.
And if not, then with earth or stone.

Then place before you as imam the one you were facing,
  and pray the midday prayer at the start of the afternoon.

This is the prayer of those who deeply know their Lord
And if you are among them, then moisten the dry land with
the ocean.

And when Sīdī al-Wāsiṭī رضي الله عنه attained it, he said, "The invokers in their remembrance of God are more forgetful than the forgetters in their remembrance, for His invocation is other than He." There are other such sayings from the people of the station of effacement رضي الله عنهم such as,

No sooner do I invoke you than I am troubled by cares
In my soul, and my heart and my spirit invoking You
Until it is as if a watcher calls out to me:
Beware and take care invoking, beware!
Do you not see His signs flowing forth illumined
And all His meanings united to yours?

As for the people of attraction without method, they are as people deem them to be. Illumination from their Lord has taken over their beings and made visible what is within them. That is how their state came to pass, as the *Ḥikam* [216] also describes: "When divine inspirations come to you, they demolish your habits: *Verily the kings, when they enter a town, ruin it and make the mightiest of its people the lowest. Thus do they act.* [27:34]."

It is more difficult for people to recognize the saints among people who work for a living and even more so among those who beg. They do not know that the great saint Sīdī Abū Salhām, who was the poorest of the poor, would fish with a little hook, even though the ocean would come to him because of his aspiration and be irresistibly under his control. As for my own master, he used to collect old paper in Fes al-Bālī, going from shop to shop like the neediest person, even while he lived his life of eighty years as a *Ghawth* (and God knows best).

People believe that it is not possible for someone to have absolute trust and dependence unless he has abandoned the workaday world. They do not know that the Prophet ﷺ, who was unequaled in his trust in God both in his own community and those of the past, worked for a living and also lived without working, just as he would both eat and fast, sleep and keep vigils—this in order to establish the Law for his community. In his community, then, there are those who have spent their lives following in his footsteps concerning trust in the Lord.

People are also perplexed by those who do not have a great deal of devotional practice and yet who find their contentment with their Lord. They do not realize that if the guest of a generous host is not expected to lift a finger, what about the guest of the Most Generous of those who are generous? Spiritual reality alludes to the Truth, and the Truth is God سبحانه وتعالى, whereas the Law alludes to the lawgiver, and that is our Prophet ﷺ. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 140

The death of the ego[282]

THERE IS NO union with God except through the death of the ego, regardless of what other practice a person might do. Its death is through opposing it, abandoning totally its point of view, and following instead the view of the people of the Muhammadan *sunna* ﷺ. The one who remains with the opinions of his ego and but thinks that he will be united with his Lord after the extinction of his vices and the effacement of his pretensions will never be united with Him,[283] for there is no union except by God's pure grace, as He has said, *And were it not for God's Bounty upon you, and His Mercy, you would have been among the losers …* [2:64]; *Were it not for God's Bounty toward you, and His Mercy, you would surely have followed Satan, save a few* [4:83]; *And were it not for God's Bounty toward you, and His Mercy, not one of you would ever be pure…* [24:21]. And the Prophet ﷺ said, "Not one of you will enter heaven by his deeds." When they asked him, "Not even you, O Messenger of God?" He replied, "Not even me unless my Lord envelops me in His mercy."[284] Other verses and *ḥadīth* have this same meaning.

---

[282] See also letter 10.

So I urge you to lower the place of your egos and to try your utmost not to fall into the forbidden and disapproved of things which your Lord has prohibited you, lest the reality of your being be changed from one that is luminous to one that it dark. I also urge that you stop trying to carry upon your shoulders by your effort planning, choice, and concern what is not yours to bear but what your Lord is responsible for—and that is your provision—but to bear patiently whatever obstacle comes your way from people and to restrain yourself from doing them any harm, for you know well that it is a central tenet of Sufism to refrain from harming others, even while bearing patiently the harm they might do to you. Be rid of every [defect] of the generality that remains within you and vie amongst yourselves to realize its opposite. Let your aspiration remain ever high, never low. In this age of ours, those with high aspirations are few indeed. You will hardly see a *faqīr*, a scholar, or a noble, without seeing someone whose aspirations are low, and this is because people in general do not direct their aspirations towards anything but the world and the love of rank—and there is neither strength nor power but through God! They have sunk down to what is below instead of rising up to what is above.

---

[283] This echoes *Ḥikam* 130.

[284] This *ḥadith* appears with various wordings in all the main collections.

O brothers, travel with your hearts from the world of desire for the ephemeral to the world of desire for the eternal. Make haste towards it and do lag behind. The people of heedlessness may lag behind, but the people of vigilance go on ahead, and continue to travel until they reach the destination. *Peace.*

◆

LETTER 141

The soul is like the earth

THE HUMAN SOUL is like the earth: if you do not plant there what is good, then what is harmful will grow instead; but it will never remain bare. If it does not yield what is beautiful, it yields what is ugly. So busy yourselves with [sowing] what will benefit you and give you goodness in this world and the Next. Go from attending to the rights of your Lord to attending to the rights of your own souls and from them back to the rights of your Lord if you wish for safety,[285] outward and inward integrity, and deliverance from need and hurt.

But to give up the workaday world and its trappings, to accomplish the minimum of rites, and to persevere in that path without being so drowned in contemplation of the Divine Immensity or in the greatness of your Prophet ﷺ that you pass away from your own senses, is simply vanity and nothing else. He who rids himself [of vices] becomes beautified [by virtues] and otherwise, not.

Yes. If things are as we have said, then no one needs to say to us anything, for that is arrival, and a powerful sign for someone who has arrived is that he finds sufficiency and contentment in God, even as God Most High says, *Does God not suffice His servant?* [39:36], and *Does it not suffice that your Lord is Witness over all things?* [41:53], and *Does he not know that God sees?* [96:14]. There are many indications that someone has found this sufficiency. Among them: he does not become unhappy if he is separated from what he desires; if he lacks something, he finds something in that lack; if he is helpless, he finds strength in that helplessness; if his situation becomes narrow, he finds vastness in that narrowness; if he is broken, he finds repair in that brokenness; if he is in loss, he finds profit in that loss … and so forth.

---

[285] Here the Shaykh is referring to the well-known *ḥadīth* in Bukhārī, Muslim, and nearly all the other main sources which relates the discourse between the Companions Salmān and Abū Dardāᶜ when the former found the latter going to excess in ascetic practices: "Your Lord has a right upon you, your soul has a right upon you, and your family has a right upon you."

Also, we believe that (it is possible) that someone could leave the workaday world but awaken in the morning with no direction to turn to with his heart, and so turn to vain thoughts and chatter, whereas someone working in the world could awaken in the morning, head straight to his work, and spend no time pondering, planning, or deciding what to choose. So occupy yourselves with what will benefit you and return its goodness to you in this world and the Next. "Move and you will be provided for," as your Prophet ﷺ said,[286] and do not be lazy.

Listen to what I said to one of the brothers by way of encouragement. He was afraid of getting married because of the disruption it might bring to his life—in fact, many people in the Way are afraid of this. So I said to him, "I see some people who have a lot of different jobs to do and it is as if they had none. And I am not talking about the elect, but rather ordinary people. And I see other people who have nothing to think about except themselves and yet they are completely mired in cares and distress. This is because they are always pondering over things, always deciding what to choose, always careworn concerning their situation." It dawned on me (and God knows best) that for [true] men of God, nothing should disrupt their relation to God, and least of all their spouses.

Upon what should the disciple depend if he abandons the means of both this world and the Next? It is amazing that someone blames his work for the fact that he is not bettering his soul and says, "If I left my job and occupied myself with my Lord, I would be better off than I am now. "while at the same time wasting so much of the free time he already has in things other than worship without feeling any remorse about that at all. That is the meaning of being forsaken by God, the meaning of loss.

---

[286] "Watch over what benefits you, seek help from God, and do not be lazy" is part of the well-known *ḥadīth* found in Muslim, Ibn Mājah, Nasāʾī, and many other collections that begins, "The strong believer is better than the weak one, but in both there is goodness…."

No one should blame his work for the fact that he is not bettering his soul and helping his family better theirs unless he is not wasting any of the moments of his life that are due to his Lord. *Peace*

LETTER 142

Striving against the ego and its desires

HE WHO WISHES to be beautified [by virtues] needs to rid himself of desires.[287] God Most High says, … *That man shall have naught but that for which he endeavored* [53:39], *And shake toward yourself the trunk of the date palm; fresh, ripe dates shall fall upon you* [19:25], and the Prophet ﷺ said, "Move and seek your provision!"[288] And we find in the *Ḥikam*, "How can the laws of nature be ruptured for you so that miracles result, while you, for your part, have yet to rupture your bad habits?" [127], and "How can the heart be illumined while the forms of creatures are reflected in its mirror? Or how can it journey to God while shackled by its passions? Or how can it desire to enter the Presence of God while it has not yet purified itself of the stain of forgetfulness? Or how can it understand the subtle points of mysteries while it has not yet repented of its offenses?" [13], and "The arrival of sustenance is in accordance with receptivity, while the raying-out of lights is in accordance with the purity of the innermost being." [113]

Keep your aspirations high and your goals pure, for the Prophet ﷺ said, "Actions are according to intentions and for each will be what he intends, so that he whose migration is for God and His Messenger, his migration is for God and His Messenger, and he whose migration is to gain something worldly or to marry a woman, then his migration is for that to which he migrated."[289] And [Sīdī Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh] also says [in the *Ḥikam*, 42]: "Travel not from creature to creature, otherwise you will be like a donkey at the mill: roundabout he turns, his goal the same as his departure. Rather, go from creatures to the Creator: *And that unto your Lord is the final end* [53:42]."

---

[287] See footnote 35 for the definitions of *al-takhliyya* and *al-taḥliyya*.

[288] See footnote 286.

[289] *Ḥadīth* in Bukhārī, Muslim, and most other main sources.

So be not among the people of low, mundane aspiration but rather among the people of sublime aspiration. Indeed, these latter are very few [in our time] such that you will hardly see a scholar, *faqīr*, or *sharīf* whose aspiration has not descended to this lower world and to the love of rank, both of which are forbidden to the people of God. I am casting my net in this teaching and in others towards the *fuqarā'* and not towards the scholars or other people because I believe that all *fuqarā'* claim to be following the Way of spiritual poverty (*al-faqr*), but that will only be true for them when they no longer attach any importance to their egos or their worldly lives. That is the true meaning of spiritual poverty. Also, the *fuqarā'* are our travelling companions just as we are theirs, so what is required of them is required of us and what will come to them will come to us.[290] This is not the situation, however, for our respected masters, the scholars رضي الله عنهم. They are neither our companions in the outward path nor the inward, something which comes solely from them, not from us, for they have chosen to distance themselves from us in both dimensions (the inward and outward), and we are not people of distance, we are people of nearness! By the grace of God, we have been granted a goodly portion of exoteric knowledge and an even greater portion of the esoteric way. If the scholars could oppose their egoistic desire and free themselves from its claim upon them, they might find that a great number of us are actually knowledgeable even with our ignorance [of certain things], and a great number of them are actually ignorant even with their knowledge [of certain things]. As Sīdī Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh رضي الله عنه says in the *Ḥikam* [35]: "What knowledge is there in a self-satisfied scholar? And what ignorance is there in an unlearned man dissatisfied with himself?"

As for the generality of the faithful, they are as my master described to one of the good people[291] of city of Fes (may God shield it from all harm) who claimed to be among of the greatest of the elect. When this man asked him, "For you, which group do I belong to—the generality or the elect?" The Shaykh answered, "The generality are higher than both of us for they do not pretend to be anything." The man continued, "So for you, if I am neither one of the elect nor one of the generality, to what group do I belong?" And my master responded, "For me, you are a species of long-eared Egyptian donkeys!"

---

[290] As Chabry notes, "This is a partial quotation from Imam al-Shādhilī often found at the beginning of copies of *al-Ḥizb al-Kabīr*: 'One who recites [this litany] shall have what we shall have and must do what we must do'. According to Ibn ᶜAbbād, the first phrase means 'shall have the sanctity we shall have,' and 'must submit to God as we must'." *Lettres sur la Voie spirituelle*, p. 321.

[291] Reading this as *ṣulaḥā'* as it appears in all three Arabic sources we have. In the context, however, this word was very possibly *ᶜulamā'*, learned scholars, in the original text.

Thus, my discourse is not with the scholars nor do I cast my net in their direction. If someone is ignorant of something, he will oppose it, and if they had tasted what men [of God] have tasted, they would say as someone has said:

> My heart was full of varied desires
> But when my eye beheld you, they were gathered into one,
> And the one I had envied came to envy me
> And I became a master over people when You became my master.
> I have left to people both their religion and their world
> To be occupied with You Alone, O my way and my world![292]

Peace.

LETTER 143

Why a devil is given some power over people of the Way

I DO NOT know whether or not you are aware that the Devil—be he cursed—has a certain amount of control over people in the Ṭarīqa. The Ṭarīqa has a living devil with the ability to do harm to its people, just as there is a devil with some power over God's saints ﵃, not to mention His Prophets (God's blessings and salutations of peace be upon them). The harm he causes increases the higher the spiritual station [as it is said in a *ḥadīth*]: "Those more sorely tried are the prophets, then the saints, then those who are like them, then those who are like them."[293] The reason for this is so that those [of the Way] may deepen their sincerity towards their Lord (be He glorified!), even as Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh says in the *Ḥikam* [72] "Whoever finds the fruits of his deeds coming quickly has proof of the fact of [their eventual] acceptance." And in the Book of God, *Behold! Truly the friends of God, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve—those who believe and are reverent. For them are glad tidings in the life of this world and in the Hereafter* [10.62].

---

[292] These lines have been attributed to al-Ḥallāj as well as to the Umayyid Caliph ʿAbd al-Mālik ibn Marwān.

There is no doubt that the Devil has no real power over [God's friends] or others, for he does not even possess the power to harm or benefit himself. If he could cause benefit, he would benefit himself, and if he could cause harm, he would harm everyone [else]. Far be it that such power belong to him or to anyone else other than God Alone. But it is Divine wisdom and one of the mysteries of Lordhood to those who know. The real way to oppose to the Devil is to turn towards God and away from the Devil, just as our Master رضي الله عنه said, "The real way to oppose the enemy is to be occupied with the love of the Friend. If you occupy yourself instead with returning enmity to your foe, then he gains what he wants and you lose the love of the Friend." And the great shaykh and saint, Sīdī Q̱āsim al-Khaṣāṣī رضي الله عنه,[b] said, "Do not concern yourself in the least with anyone who hurts you. Rather, occupy yourself with God and He will answer him for you. For in truth, He is the One who moved him against you to test your claims of sincerity. A lot of people err in respect to this and get involved in trying to hurt the one who hurts them, with the result that the hurt continues along with the sin.[294] If they turned back to God, however, He would repel [their adversary] and suffice them in the matter." This is the view of the greatest of the Sufis, the people of spiritual training. We also see that the devil who is given power over the people of the Way is human, not one of the jinn, and we see that he is smarter and stronger than those of the jinn. What is clear, however, concerning both of them in their seeking to have power over the child of Adam, is that the Book of God says: *Surely the scheme of Satan is ever feeble* [4:76], and again we say to you: true opposition to the enemy is to turn away from him and towards God. *Peace.*

---

[293] See footnote 223.

[294] That is, the sin of neglecting God.

LETTER 144

Inviting people for gatherings of invocation and teaching

SOMEONE WHO KEEPS the obligatory worship and the affirmed *sunna*, who is careful about removing any urine that remains after urination as [the conditions of purity] require, someone who is clean, humble, and satisfied [with what God gives]—that person is in the best of states and has attained what the people of God attain .

The tongue says to the head, "How are you this morning?" and it answers, "If I am safe from you, I am fine." He who wants safety in his religion and his soul should occupy himself with the invocation of his Lord or stay quiet or sleep, for this time and the people of this time are extremely hard.

I encourage my brother to remind the servants of God as much as he can,[295] even as God Most High has said, *And remind, for truly the Reminder benefits the believers* [51:55]. He should not push them straight back towards their jobs, but at the same time he needs to encourage them to return so that there will not be a great number of people [at one time]. Rather, if a group of them spend the night, he should encourage them to return so that others may come, and continue in this way until his feet become firmly planted in God's Way. When that happens, what I am cautioning him about will no longer harm him. Rather, it will benefit him and by it he will be increased towards his Lord. Also, I do not want him to be so malleable that he abandons his own view for someone else's. There is no good for you in doing that. What is good for you and for others is in what is pleasing to God, not in what is pleasing to the servant. What is pleasing to people is the most difficult thing to know, and only a madman searches for what he can never know. Also, beware and again beware of [heeding] the opinions of the *fuqarā'* or others when your own opinion is clear, for God Most High has said, *Indeed, man shall be a testimony against himself...* [75:14] and *Were you to obey most of those on earth, they would lead you astray from the way of God* [6:116]. If you are confused about a certain matter and do not know whether it is better to do it or not do it, then make haste to offer the prayer of seeking God's choice (*al-istikhāra*) as related by the Prophet ﷺ,[296] or else to offer a prayer of two bowings and to recite short sūras in each, such as *Did We not expand your breast ...* [sūrah 94] and *Truly, We sent it down ...* [sūrah 97], then to invoke blessings upon the Prophet ﷺ, even if only three times in the morning and the evening, and then to say *God suffices us, an excellent Guardian is He!* [3:173], and "There is no strength nor power but through God, the Sublime and All-Mighty" the same [number of times]. God will affirm to you what is true and invalidate what is false, and God is a warrant for what we say.

---

[295] This letter appears to be written to one of the Shaykh's representatives (*muqaddamīn*) and is speaking about inviting large groups of people for gatherings of invocation and teaching.

We see that if the traveler to God keeps this practice and consults his heart—following the advice of the Prophet ﷺ to one of the Companions ؓ, "Consult your heart!"—then his heart will affirm only what is true. Of course, if you are certain that the insight of one of the *fuqarā'* or someone else is greater than your own, then the correct thing to do is to follow that companion's view, whether he be a *faqīr* or not. And may God strengthen your support and be your aid. *Peace.*

LETTER 145

Being open to "the breezes of the spirit"; visiting saints, both living and dead

BEWARE OF LETTING time pass you by without your having attained what people of fervor have reached in every time and place. Do all you can to be open to the "spiritual breezes" (*nafaḥāt*) of your Lord,[297] and do not be weak or lazy about this, lest there pass you by what has passed by so many people—and there is no strength nor power but through God! If you want to be open to these spiritual breezes, then do not always follow what your ego desires and what is light for it; rather, follow what it does not desire and what is heavy for it, in order that it might traverse the path and harvest the fruits of its practices. If someone is taken up with practices which do not increase him in vigilance, he will never meet the people [of God] nor be free of error, regardless of whatever else he may do.

---

[296] Letter 234 describes how to offer this prayer.

[297] The word *al-nafḥa* (pl. *nafaḥāt*) is a Sufi term which comes from a *ḥadīth* that states: "Verily, throughout the days of your life, God has breezes of the spirit. So be open to them that perchance one of them might reach you and you will never be sorrowful again." Ṭabarānī, *al-Kabīr*, and with similar wording in Ibn Abī Shayba,

One of the saints said, "To give up one of the ego's many desires is more useful to the heart than fasting and keeping night vigils for a year." And another said, "I would rather abstain from one bite of my evening meal, than to eat it and then stand all night in prayer."[298] This is one way for you to be open to the breezes of your Lord, to shorten your path, to sweeten your moments, and to have the nearness to your Lord that others have had.

I would also urge you to visit the living masters of Ṭarīqa رضي الله عنه if you find them—and the world is never empty of them except to one who is himself empty of blessing and goodness. But no one will find them except the one who truly and urgently needs to. It is his pressing need (*iḍṭirār*) of them that will bring him into contact with them wherever they might be, in the lands of the Muslims or the lands of the Christians. Either the teachers will come to the disciple or the disciple will come to the teachers. Divine Power will bear him to them or them to him, or he might even find them with him in the same house or near it. This is what happened to me when I realized my true need of someone to take me by the hand: I found him so near to me that we were almost in the same house... Such is the secret of urgent need, O you who do not know the mysteries contained in God's creation!

There was once a man who begged one of the saints to show him [a vision of] the Messenger of God ﷺ, and kept begging him until finally [the saint] told him to eat his fill of fish but refrain from drinking any

---

al-Muṣannaf, Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab al-īmān*, and al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir al- uṣūl*.

[298] Both of these saying are attributed to Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī. See *Qūt al-qulūb*, Chapter 39 and also Knysh, *op. cit*. p. 159.

water, all night, until dawn. So he did what he told him to do, and slept that night, but did not see in his sleep anything but water, nor could he think about anything else.[299]

And in the *Ḥikam* of Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh [156] : "Glory be to the One Who does not guide anyone to His saints except someone whom He wishes to guide to Himself, and does not unite anyone with one of them except someone whom He wishes to unite to Himself."

I also strongly urge you to make visits to the resting places of those saints who have passed on, including the tomb of our Shaykh, ﵁, and of the great shaykh Mawlānā ᶜAbd al-Salām ibn Mashīsh, and of Sīdī al-Ghazālī,[b] and those like them, as well as to venerated places such as Jabal Tizirān in the Ghomāra region (may God protect it), the Banī Yafriḥ region of al-Akhmās, the stone that bears the words *Lā ilāha illā Allāh* in the region of Zanata, al-Manṣūra in the region of al-Aḥmadiyya, the Ribāṭāt,[300] and other such places. He who raises his aspiration above this world will meet God's friends. In having high aspirations are extraordinary benefits, including the fact that if the one who has it says to something "be", it will be—and may God be a warrant for what we say.

I would also advise that if someone confronts you with one of the attributes of freedom, you confront him with the attributes of servanthood; if he confronts you with words, confront him with silence; if he confronts you with might, confront him with humility; if he confronts you with power, confront him with weakness—and so forth, and in this way you will surely overcome him, overpower him, and defeat him. And God is a warrant for what we say. *Peace.*

---

[299] The end of this vignette, which the Shaykh does not mention, is that the man then went to the saint the next morning and told him that all he had seen in his dreams was water, to which the saint replied, "When you long to see the Prophet ﷺ as much as you were longing for water, then you will see him."

[300] Jabal Tizirān (see map with introduction), altitude 6240 feet, is mentioned by Leo Africanus, V. 2, p. 525, as Mount Tezirin, which he says, "... aboundeth greatly with fountains, deserts, & vineyards. Upon the top thereof stand divers ancient buildings, which (so farre foorth as I can conjecture) were erected by the Romains ...." Al-Akhmās (see map) is the Jabāla region where Chefchaouen is located, very close to the Shaykh's land of Banī Zarwāl. The Ribāṭāt probably refer to the first mosques in Morocco, built by the Omayyads in their 8th century westward advance across North Africa.

⁂

LETTER 146

Caution against making begging a worldly pursuit

WHAT HAS HAPPENED to you is what happened to two of the people of Paradise. They entered it and the first thing they found was a river of milk or wine, and they were about to drink from it in the extreme thirst that had come over them when it was said to them, "If you keep going, you will find something sweeter than this!" to which they replied, "May your father find it and your father keep going! As for us, this is all we were after!"

Such is your situation (may God be kind to you and us). When you turned to your Lord, this lower world turned towards you and offered itself to you. Then it took from you your coarse jellabas, your rosaries, your staffs, and everything you had without your even knowing that you were being taken captive by your enemy. And if you had known, still your desire for the ephemeral had completely taken control of you (may God Most High be with you and us!).

Dear brothers, none of the people of the Way has ever told anyone that they should beg from people as a regular practice. You have overdone this to an extreme because you have found in it a door to worldliness and a way to satisfy an extraordinary number of your desires, while before you would not have hoped to satisfy a single one. There is truly no good for you in this. What is good for you is to distance yourselves from those desires, following what the Sufis have said: "Whoever follows his passion, forfeits his purity,"[301] and "To give up one of the ego's many desires is more useful to the heart than fasting and keeping night vigils for a year," and "I would rather abstain from one bite of my evening meal, than to eat it and then stand all night in prayer."[302]

For me, whoever really knows his goal finds it easy to give up what he gives up. Someone who knows God is not distracted even by the delights of Heaven, so how could he be distracted by the delights of this world? The one who is ignorant of God, on the other hand, is ruled by desires both for this world and the Next. Turn away, therefore, from begging and follow the path of the people of God if you wish to arrive and be delivered from error. "States of need are gift-laden carpets."[303] So [in pursuing mendicancy] you close that door and deprive yourselves of its blessing. About *al-fāqa*, which means extreme need, our master ﵁ used to say, "If people knew what secrets and goodness reside in states of need, they would not need anything except need," and also, "Being in a state of need takes the takes the place [of invoking] the Supreme Name of God." So draw near, dear brothers, to what your Prophet ﷺ drew near to, and flee from anything else. That is the safest path and surest to deliver you. Shaykh Sīdī al-Būṣīrī says in his Burda,

---

[301] A saying found in the final part of *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*. Knysh, *op. cit.*, p. 415.
[302] See footnote 298.

> The highest mountains of gold sought to entice him
> But he showed them in return the true meaning of elevation.[304]

If you are satisfied with what you have, may God give you happiness through it. I have nothing to do with those who beg, except those who do not importune people or beg with cupidity for what they have, which is the way of the folk ﵃. Indeed, if there is a large group of *fuqarā'* who beg, then the nature of this practice ceases to be illuminating and turns into something dark instead. Also, he who is annoyed by people's insults or the scarcity of something will never succeed. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 147

The blessing of anonymity (*al-khumūl*)

IF YOU HAVE resolved to visit me as one of the brethren has informed me, may God strengthen you and aid you by His grace. The secret is in keeping [this visit] as quiet as possible so that only a few accompany you, for with large numbers of people comes notoriety, and there is nothing more harmful for aspirants than notoriety. In addition, large numbers of people are a burden, and our Prophet ﷺ said, "Neither I nor the pious ones of my community have anything to do with *takalluf*."[305] Anonymity is a gift from God and proof enough of its excellence is in the words of God ﷻ, *And We wished to bestow grace upon those who were deemed weak in the land and to make them leaders and to make them inheritors, and to establish them in the land.* [28.5-6]. As for those who wish to visit apart from those who were [already] coming with you, it is better for them to wait until you return and then to visit little by little.

---

[303] *Ḥikam*, 176.

[304] *The Burda*, Spiker, *op. cit.* line 31.

Know, dear brother, that for more than forty-three or forty-four years (God knows best) I have been among disciples and calling them to God Most High, and I have been able to observe their states. I have found that they have many different goals, and I have wanted to see them content, but it seems to me truly impossible, and only a madman would seek what is impossible, as they say. In general, however, one objective that is common to many of them is the desire to have some sort of standing or rank, and to let go of that ambition is one of the absolute conditions of Way. As the *Ḥikam* [11] of Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh states, "Bury your existence in the earth of obscurity, for whatever sprouts forth without having first been buried flowers imperfectly," and as one of the saints said, "This path of ours only works for those who sweep the rubbish heaps with their spirits."[306] Also, as Sīdī Abū Ḥafs ᶜUmar ibn al-Fāriḍ said in his Qaṣīda in *Tā'*:

> If lowliness were not honored in love,
> Love, for me, would hold no delight
> And were it not for love,
> My honor would not be in lowliness.

And another said:

> If you cannot bear to be lowly in your love
> Then the Beloved will leave you no matter what else you do.
> Be humble before the One you love to merit honor,
> For what honor a person attains in being lowly!

---

[305] See footnote 248.

[306] See footnote 68.

If the One you love is precious and you are not lowly before
Him
Then bid goodbye to all hopes of arrival.

And another said:

Be lowly before the One you love: love is not simple
But if the Beloved be content with you, you will arrive
without fail.

No doubt, lowliness is servanthood, servanthood is the door to freedom, and God Most High says, *Enter houses by their doors* [2:189].

In a word, I strongly advise you not to let the disciples head in so many directions such as increasing the number of representatives (*muqaddamīn*).[307] This should be limited to you and whoever you are happy with and choose. This is the right course, and may God curse those who lie. Regarding this, it appears to me that the *faqīh*, Sīdī so-and-so, is someone you are pleased with for this position, and we would like you to choose only those like him. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 148

Concerning the judge who insulted some of the *fuqarā'*

SĪDĪ MUḤAMMAD IBN ᶜAbdallāh al-Bajlālī, I am one of those who love you for the sake of God. I do not know if you know this or not. The reason for my love of you is that I was in the Madrasa al-Maṣbāḥiyya in Fes al-Bālī when you were living there in the 1170s AH and I used to hear the students always speak well of you and care a great deal about you. Then [the love for you that] had taken hold of them also took hold of me and that has been the case for me since that time up until now, and it will remain so (God willing) until God inherits the earth and what is upon it, for I hear only good concerning you.

The point of this is to say that as I have advised you, may God reward you with goodness on our account. You know, O man of faith, that those at the beginning [of the Way] are very prone to error, especially if they are not always in the presence of someone who is instructing them. No one, in fact, succeeds except by being the companion of someone who has succeeded and no one fails except by being the companion of someone who has failed. My master ﵁ used to say to me, "Grasp it with your hand, and hold it with your teeth, and if you see something that you don't like, then close your eyes so that I won't fly away and leave you."[308]

---

[307] A *muqaddam* in this context is a local representative of the Ṭarīqa, usually with permission to initiate new disciples.

True salvation is in following God's Messenger ﷺ but desire can get the best of anyone except those who have been granted prior protection with God. So if you see some one of us who is violating [the *sunna*] intentionally or by mistake, please make haste to remind him, even as God has commanded, *Remind, for verily reminder benefits the faithful* [51:55]. He also said, *Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and debate with them in ways that are best* [16:125], and not as the judge there, Sīdī al-Muṣṭafā ibn Jalūl, did.

I ask you by God if there has ever been anything recorded concerning Imam Mālik ﵁, al-Shāfiʿī, al-Ḥanafī, al-Ḥanbalī or any other of the imams that they plucked out the beard of a Muslim?[309] Or was there no one in their time who disobeyed God? We seek refuge in God that [someone would claim] such a thing. In every age there has been obedience and sin, repentance and forgiveness ... and God is greater. [But in this incident] where is knowledge (*ʿilm*) and where is clemency (*ḥilm*)? Where is patience and where is slowness? Where is detachment, complete trust, scrupulousness, lenience, satisfaction, humility, pardon, compassion, mercy, fear of God, modesty, shame, generosity, and noble character? Where are any of those great virtues?

In the *Ḥikam* of Ibn ʿAṭā'illāh it states: "Whoever gets to know the secrets of servants without patterning himself on the Divine Mercifulness finds his knowledge a tribulation and a cause for drawing evil upon himself," [158] and also, "The best knowledge is the one accompanied by fear," [232], and "What knowledge is there in a self-satisfied scholar? And what ignorance is there in an unlearned man dissatisfied with himself?"[35]

---

[308] It is not uncommon for novices, after a certain initial period of attraction, to begin seeing faults in their teacher.

[309] Shaykh Bassām, the editor of the best printed edition of these letters in Arabic, sees this expression as meaning to insult someone's honor. It is also possible, however, that it describes the actual physical act of pulling some hairs out of a man's beard in anger and aggression.

It was said to al-Shaᶜbī رضي الله عنه in the beginning of [his] time, "O learned one (*yā ᶜalīm*)!" and he answered, "Do not say, 'O learned one!' but say instead, 'O *faqīh*,' because a true *ᶜālim* is someone who fears God." No doubt, the only thing that could have brought the *faqīh* Sīdī Muṣṭafā whom I have mentioned to insult the honor of the people attached to God is having little fear and little shame before God. If these had not been so lacking in him, he would have been too occupied with his own [faults] to even think of the servants of his Lord. If only he had looked carefully at his own slate, he would have forgotten all about the slates of others, just as the greatest imams and elect among the people have done. I would not be averse to someone asking him, "Have you gained such control over yourself that you are righteous and have control over other people? Or have you left your own self in a river of desires and transgressions to then lord over the poor, the weak, and the strangers who are attached to the way of the Lord and who are opposing their desires?" I also do not know if anyone said to him, "God (be He blessed and exalted!) is the helper of the one who has no other helper." *Peace.*

◆

LETTER 149

Invoking the Supreme Name and keeping silent except to mention the good

I AM NOT against your asking all the brothers in your region to invoke the Supreme Name of God silently until they are rid of their lower desires, in which case they may invoke silently or aloud; it will make no difference. I would also not be against it if you asked them to maintain silence all the time except in cases where you are sure that words are absolutely needed for some good, for in silence there are extraordinary benefits. The least amount of practice would be enough for them if they stayed away from what did not concern them and strove to bring their characters into conformity with the character of their Prophet ﷺ. By God, if we do this, then he ﷺ is never absent from us no matter where we are. Also, how could we hope to have a vision of our Prophet ﷺ if we ourselves have bad character? By God, that will never happen. We do not see that it would increase us in anything except remoteness, nor is there any meaning to our spiritual efforts if our character remains bad. Thus, when it was said to the Messenger of God ﷺ, “Such and such a woman fasts during the day and stands the night in prayer, but she has a foul temper and says hurtful things about her neighbors,” he said, “Then there is no good in her and she is among the people of the Fire.”[310]

Lastly, as we said many times, someone who is distressed—or we could say pained—by people’s insults or by the smallest thing will never succeed. *Peace.*

LETTER 150

Concerning al-Khiḍr ﵇

CONCERNING AL-KHIḌR ﵇,[311] there is a difference of opinion. Some have said he is a saint, some that he is a Prophet, and some that he is a Messenger. What I have to say concerning this question is what has already reached you, except that [I do not agree with] anyone who finds it impossible to accept the fact that he taught things to the Messenger of God, our master Moses—upon him and our Prophet be peace. God has told us he did in His Words, *And how can you bear patiently that which you do not encompass in awareness?* [18:68], and then *As for the ship, it belonged to indigent people who worked the sea* [18:79], and then *And as for the young boy, his parents were believers* [18:80]; and then *And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city* ... [18:82]. Is this not teaching? It is, in fact, great teaching, and we are listening only to what the Book of God, the *ḥadīth* of the Messenger ﷺ, and the most trustworthy ones of this community say. In a *ḥadīth*, the Messenger of God ﷺ says, “May God be merciful to my brother Moses. If he had been patient, we would have benefitted

---

[310] Ḥākim, *al-Mustadrak*, Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab al-Īmān*, and other sources.

[311] See footnote 138.

. . ."[312] Based on [this exchange] are a hundred religious questions (and God knows best), but this alone is enough to show that a prophet or saint might know what a Messenger does not know, even if a Messenger is more knowledgeable and excellent. Also, if a person of knowledge were infallible, he would not receive divine help. Rather, he would be claiming for himself a Divine Attribute,[313] and there is no way for him or anyone else to do such a thing. Thus, it is said in the *Ḥikam*, "He has prohibited you from claiming for yourself, among the qualities of created beings, that which does not belong to you. So would He permit you to lay claim to His Attribute, He Who is the Lord of the Universe?" [126] And in the Book of God: *And you have not been given knowledge, save a little* [17:85]. It has also been said that [at times] it is part of Divine protection not to know something.

God Most High has given His Messengers (God's blessings and salutations of peace be upon them) both powerlessness and overwhelming power as ways of aiding them. And He has supported them as well by His attribute when He strengthens them with His help.[314] For He (be He glorified) is the Infinitely Wise and Knowing, and He, over all things, has power. He helps His Prophets, His saints, and all His servants, just as He helps his Messengers (God's blessings and salutations of peace be upon them), and were it not for this help, each and every one of us would be in darkness.

Know that when the Jews decided to ask our Prophet ﷺ about the meaning of "the Spirit" (*al-Rūḥ*), they said [amongst themselves], "If he cannot answer, it means he is a prophet; otherwise, he is not." He did not answer them and could not answer them until God caused him ﷺ to know what to say to them, which was: *They ask you about the Spirit. Say, "The Spirit is from the Command of my Lord."* [17:85] Indeed, that inability on his part is one of the attributes of the servant, and [to be God's servant] is the highest honor. Thus does God say in praise of

---

[312] The better-known version of this *ḥadīth* begins, "May the mercy of God be upon us and upon Moses. If he had not been in a hurry, he would have seen marvels . . ." (Muslim) or, ". . . he would have related [more]," (Aḥmad) or "he would have seen the most amazing of marvels," (Ibn Ḥibbān).

[313] Which is to say, unlimited knowledge.

[314] Echoing the Qur'ān: 3:13, 8:26, and 8:62.

His Prophet ﷺ, *Glory be to Him Who carried His servant by night* [17:1] and not, "His Prophet" nor "His Messenger."

LETTER 151

Servanthood (*al-ʿubūdiyya*)

BY GOD, THERE is truly no nobility except in the state of servanthood and that is why God praised His Prophet ﷺ for it in His Book, saying *Glory be to Him Who carried His servant by night* [17:1] and did not say, "His Prophet," or "His Messenger," or anything else. Rather, He chose the name "servant," for he ﷺ was the true and genuine servant. God also praised the state of servanthood in other of the Prophets (God's blessings and salutations of peace be upon them) when He said in His Book, *How excellent a servant!* [38:30, 34], and *remember Our servants Abraham, Isaac and Jacob* [38:45], or in another recitation, *Our servant Abraham* ... and other such examples. What is obvious and not hidden to those whose inner vision God is opened and whose innermost beings He has illuminated is that servanthood is a honor to each who realizes it, regardless of who he might be. So take it in your firmest grip, following always what is heaviest on your egos, not what is lightest. God Most High says, *There is none in the heavens and on the earth, but that it comes unto the Compassionate as a servant* [19:93], but there is a great difference between someone who becomes God's servant willingly and one who becomes His servant because he is overwhelmed and has no other choice. Assuredly, there is no other path to freedom except through the door of servanthood. *Peace.*

LETTER 152

The spiritual work of women; transmitting the litany

GOD MOST HIGH has lifted from a woman who is menstruating or who has post-partum bleeding the obligation of offering the Prayer—which is a form of obligatory worship for His servants—so what about other forms of worship? If women avoid matters that do not concern them, maintain what God has made obligatory upon them, and do not offer any supererogatory worship other than what they have the strength to do, they will be among the happy and the blessed, God willing, and not among those who grieve. In truth, they need not take on more than this. For they are the ones who grind flour, sift, roll, knead, and cook. They tie the animals to graze and release them, sweep, water, gather firewood, spin yarn, milk, churn, carry their children,[315] and raise them. All of these are great deeds and all are kinds of spiritual effort. Doing these, they have no need [for other practices] except the obligatory prayer, the fast [of Ramadan], to pay zakat for those who have the minimum amount of wealth upon which it is due, and make the Pilgrimage for those who are able. The same, in fact, holds true for men: if they occupy themselves with what concerns them and what concerns fulfilling the obedience due to their Lord, we do not want them to try to take on more than they can bear, for the Prophet ﷺ said, "Neither I nor the pious ones of my community have anything to do with *takalluf*."[316] And also, "When clemency (*al-rifq*) enters a heart, it makes it beautiful,"[317] and as you know [from the poem], "The quality of clemency endures for those who possess it."[318]

Know, too, that a human being only benefits from deeds that he accomplishes with knowledge. The master of my master, Sīdī al-ᶜArabī ibn ᶜAbdallāh, once said to my master, Sīdī ᶜAlī al-Jamal ؓ, "This state of yours," by which he meant *al-tajrīd*, "combines within it what is manifest and what is hidden, and I only say this to you so that it might benefit you." This is also true for me, dear brother: I only mention these things concerning women so that you might let them know about the work they do, because many of them do not see it as [spiritual] practice, when in fact—by God—it is among the greatest of practices and by way of it does God erase sins and elevate degrees. So please tell them this that they might do it with enthusiasm and not half-heartedly, and that they might know that *it is great in the Eyes of God* [24:15].

---

[315] *Yaḥmalna awlādahunna* could possibly mean "they bear them in pregnancy," but the more likely meaning here is to carry them on their backs. This is still a common practice in Morocco.

[316] See footnote 248.

[317] Ṭabarānī, *al-Awsaṭ*. The Shaykh quotes this *ḥadīth* in the sense that clemency also includes being lenient in respect to religious practice. In a better-known *ḥadīth* that appears in Bukhārī, Muslim, and many other principal sources, it is in the advice of the Prophet ﷺ to ᶜĀ'isha ؓ when she replied in anger to certain Jews who had spoken hurtfully to him: "Practice clemency and beware of severity…(*ᶜalayki bi –l-rifq wa iyāki wa'l-ᶜunf*)."

[318] This is part of a line from the famous North African supplicatory poem, *al-Munfarija* by Abū'l-Faḍl ibn Naḥwī (d. 513/1098): "The quality of clemency endures for the one who possess it, while a harsh nature leads to turmoil."

Something else that I must add. If there is anyone in your region who really wants to recite the litany, the last time you were here I gave you permission to transmit it to him. Perfection belongs to God alone,[319] and upon Him do we depend. As for the invocation of the Unique Name practiced by many of the people in the Ṭarīqa, that must be done only on the condition that the invoker has ritual purity in body, clothes, and place, that his stomach is empty of what is forbidden, his tongue is clean of lies, slander, and back-biting, and he has turned away from what is forbidden, what is disapproved, and what does not concern him. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 153

The effects of too much talk, food, and social contact

THE *FAQĪR* WITHOUT a heart is never free of turbidity (*al-kadar*),[320] always complaining, always weeping, always groaning. Only if he finds his heart will he escape his turbidity, illness, or whisperings. To do this, the most effective means we know is for him to break the habits of his ego, and by habits I mean talking too much, eating too much, and having too much to do with people. As for sleep, however, that will not harm him. On the contrary, it will benefit him if it is in its proper time.

By God, nothing has kept the *fuqarā'*—concerning what is past and what is yet to come—from being drowned in the Spirit except too much talk, too much food, and too much contact with people. If the character of the *faqīr* could reflect what is opposite to excessive talk, and that is silence, what is opposite to satiety, and that is hunger, and what is opposite to excessive contact with people, and that is isolation, and to hold back on or turn away from all together [his desire] to pursue the sensory, which is the opposite of the spiritual, he would be drowned in the spiritual, and not able to emerge from its ocean, the same way Imam al-Ghazālī, Imam Ibn ᶜArabī al-Ḥātimī, Imam al-Shādhilī, and others like them, including our master, were.

---

[319] This phrase is usually used in Morocco in connection to a mistake someone has made. It may have been that the Shaykh had not previously made clear to the person to whom he is writing what he is telling him here.

[320] See footnote 45.

As we have said before, the sensory world has taken them over completely and seized their hearts and limbs. It has become the only thing that preoccupies them, the only thing they chatter about, the only thing they know, as if God Most High had not made for them as many spiritual insights as He has made waves upon the sea. If they knew this, they would no longer be distracted by the sensory from the spiritual; if they knew it, they would find within themselves shoreless seas. And God is a warrant for what I say.

Nothing has befallen anyone—by which I mean, no one has been [spiritually] ruined—except from a direction which he knew, not from a direction of which he was unaware. Excessive talk, food, and contact with people—everyone truly knows that these things which are bad for the heart do harm, not good. Everyone knows this and especially the learned. But desires overwhelm them and disgrace them, forbid them, increase them in illness, blind them, and leave them totally lost, *Deaf, dumb, and blind, they do not understand* [2:171] except for very few. To God we belong and to Him we are returning. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 154

A letter summing up the Way

FOR A LONG time I have wanted to write a letter that summed up precisely [the principles of] our Ṭarīqa so that all of us agree about what is essential to it, but all that came to me concerning this were unformed ideas. Then God granted me the means by which what was far became near for me without hardship or fatigue. This was when I heard one of you speaking about something useless but spending the length of time it would take to offer supererogatory prayers of eighteen bowings, recite five sixtieths of the Qur'ān,[321] or harvest three bushels of grain! From the sunset prayer until the evening prayer, this person (may God be kind to him) continued talking about some useless subject, and this is definitely not the way a sincere disciple should behave nor will it ever be.

Listen to what people [of God] have done: Sīdī Abū'l-Qāsim al-Shāṭibī ﵁[b] would never speak to anyone except out of necessity; Sīdī ᶜUmar al-Zayyātī[b] would not himself speak, and if he was spoken to, he would answer, "Allāh! Allāh! *Say, "Allāh," then leave them to play at their vain discourse* [6:91]!" And whenever Sīdī ᶜAlī al-Ḥājj al-Baqqāl ﵁[b] finished one kind of worship, he would begin another. Those and others like them are the people [of God]; they are noble lords. They are the ones who say, 'God is our Lord,' and are upright, the ones who shall have no fear nor shall they grieve, as God says in two noble verses: *Truly those who say, "Our Lord is God," then stand firm, no fear shall come upon them; nor shall they grieve* [46:13] and *Truly those who say, "Our Lord is God," then stand firm, the angels will descend upon them, [saying], "Fear not, nor grieve"* [41:30]. And He says, be He glorified *Those who believe and are reverent. For them are glad tidings in the life of this world and in the Hereafter...* [10:63].

But those who say, "Our Lord is God." and then are not upright, but rather waste their lives in what God has not enjoined upon them, are not the people (of God) nor respected masters, and they shall have both fear and grief. So turn away from what does not benefit you. Beware of it always. Do not waste your lives in what God has not commanded you to do, and may God take you by the hand.

The great master, Sīdī Ḥasan al-Baṣrī ﵁[b] said, "I have known people who were more careful with the moments of their lives than you are with your dinars and dirhams. Just as you would not want to spend your dinars and dirhams on anything that did not bring you benefit, they do not want to spend the moments of their lives on anything that does not bring them benefit."

---

[321] For purposes of regular recitation, the Qur'ān is divided into thirty parts (*juz*, pl. *ajzā'*), each of which in turn is divided into two portions (*ḥizb*, pl. *aḥzāb*). In Morocco for centuries it has been a widespread practice to read one *ḥizb* in a group recitation aloud after the dawn worship, and a second *ḥizb* after the sunset worship. Such recitation of the *ḥizb* takes about twenty minutes, so the Shaykh is saying that the man spoke for about an hour and a half.

There is a tradition which says, "There is no time which comes to a servant in which he neglects the remembrance of God Most High except that it will be a loss to him and a source of regret on the Day of Judgment."[322] Pay attention, as well, to your own states and do not be deluded by the states of the vain people of your time.

What we have said sums up for you what the Ṭarīqa is so that you can all agree on what is essential to it. [A *faqīr*] should be especially careful concerning the cleanliness of his body, clothes, and the places where he sits, careful to remove any urine after urination as the rules of ablution require, and careful to visit the shaykh and those who follow him. [He should be] good to his parents, humble, and he should turn away from the objects of his lower desires at all times. As the Sufis رضي الله عنهم say, "This path of ours only works for those who sweep the rubbish heaps with their spirits."[323] He should also occupy himself with accomplishing religious means—whatever they might be—and not be occupied or distracted by anything, be it religious or worldly, that holds no benefit. Rather, he should be following what are confirmed to be the commandments of his Lord on the condition that he does not take upon himself more than he has strength to bear, in accordance with his Lord's Book which says, *And God has placed no hardship for you in the religion* [22:78], and the *sunna* of his Prophet ﷺ who said, "Neither I nor the pious ones of my community have anything to do with *takalluf*,"[324] and other similar injunctions.

Assuredly, if a *faqīr* does not move except [to accomplish] what is beneficial, and does not cease to move except for something else that is beneficial, and does not busy himself with anything that contains no benefit for him, his spiritual dimension will grow ever stronger, and when that happens, he will have no need of taking on anything extra except what is absolutely necessary, for he will be drowned in oceans of reflection, and "An hour of reflection is more excellent than seventy years of physical devotions."[325]

---

[322] The *ḥadīth*, "For people who sit together in a gathering and do not remember God, that gathering with be a source of loss and regret for them on the Day of Judgment, even if they enter Paradise," is found in Nasāʾī, *Sunan al-kubrā* and in his *ᶜAmal al-yawm wa'l-layla*.

[323] See footnote 68.

[324] See footnote 248.

⁂

LETTER 155

Encouragement to a certain *faqīr* and what it means to be "just like other people"

IF YOU ARE scrupulous in word and deed and treat as equals the one who honors you and the one who demeans you, the one who gives to you and the one who withholds from you, the one who stays in contact with you and the one who cuts himself off from you, the one who loves you and the one who hates you, the one who accepts you and the one who rejects you, the one who knows your worth and the one who is ignorant of your worth, the one who scratches you like a hedgehog and the one who swaddles you like a baby—then we have no doubts about your perfection, for we know no one else who has plunged as deeply into the science of the folk as you have done nor do we know of anyone who has a heart like yours, may God revive the Ṭarīqa by way of you and protect you by His grace from the evil of anyone who envies you.

I say this only that you might know that God's grace to you is beyond what has been received by other *fuqarā'* of this time, for I see the water of their knowledge and faith is blocked by their bad opinions of others,[326] their hidden vices, their pride and desire for power, their stubbornness and self-satisfaction, their ignorance, and their ignorance of their ignorance. If they could better their opinions [of others] and bow their heads to the people of their time, God would let the water [of their knowledge and faith] flow forth. It is also blocked by their lack of aspiration and their claims of being "just like other people," when they are really not. If they were just like other people, they would do what other people do. If one of them claims to be like people and to do what people do, then his state would be just like other people's, which means he would not be concerned with his ego. He would abase it, not honor it, lower it, not raise it up, belittle it, not magnify it, show it for it is, not conceal it. He would shop in the marketplaces as people do and get what he needed there with his own hands, whatever those needs might be—meat, or tripe, head or skin, chicken, eggs, or a saddle blanket, a bunch of garlic or a bunch of onions—or anything like that—and he would carry it in his own hands or else on his shoulders or his donkey, or his cow.

---

[325] See footnote 44.

[326] See footnote 133.

By God, I cannot imagine one of them doing that, but if he did, he would be "just like people." He would be rid of what he had believed about himself because he would be on their same level. He and they would become the same. But that is not the way things are. The way things are is that such a person [believes] that people are common and he is special, and this notion he has does not arise from the fact that he worships more than they do, or that his character is better than theirs, or that he is more humble, but rather because he believes his place in the world is above theirs because they are people who deal with the workaday world with their own hands, while his reputation is guarded by the fact that no one ever sees him in anything except the lofty situations he prefers, and which are not hidden. He does not know (may God be kind to him) that one of the greatest of the saints carried water in the marketplace, and another auctioned off donkeys, and another played the horn, and another rode to market on a donkey with his wife sitting behind him, and there are other such example, which is why the Sufis say, "This path of ours only works for those who sweep the rubbish heaps with their spirits."[327]

Know that Shaykh al-Majdhūb ؓ,[b] who is one of our masters and one of the summits of sanctity in this land of ours, said, "The water of the Maghreb is cut off except for our water, and that will not be cut off until the Hour is established." Sīdī Yūsuf al-Fāsi[b] drank from it, as did his descendent Sīdī ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān[b] the gnostic, and from him, the master, Sīdī Aḥmad ibn ᶜAbdallāh[b], and from him, his son

---

[327] See footnote 68.

Sīdī al-ᶜArabī ibn ᶜAbdallāh[b] in the Makhfiyya district of Fes, (may God be pleased with them and benefit us through their blessing) and from him, our master, Abū'l-Ḥasan Sīdī ᶜAlī ibn Sīdī ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ḥasanī al-ᶜAmrānī who was called "al-Jamal"[b], and from him al-ᶜArabī ibn Aḥmad al-Sharīf al-Darqāwī.[328] And of course, from each of these masters many people other than those we have mentioned have received teachings and blessings. *Peace.*

LETTER 156

Seeing what is between you and the Creator rather than you and creatures

IF YOU WISH for God's grace upon you to appear, then be steady in your practice, always attentive to what will benefit you and bring you its goodness in this world and the Next, knowledgeable of the rules of your Ṭarīqa, and acting in accordance with them. Avoid getting involved with what does not concern you, and do not follow what is light for you but rather what is heavy for you. That is better for you since the ego has no share in it, and whatever the ego has no share in is purely for your Lord. Also, pay no attention either to the one who blames you or the one who praises you, but rather say with the tongue of your state: "That which you do not like about me is what my heart desires."

> If You are sweetness, I care not if life be bitter.
> If You are content, leave people to their anger.
> If what is between You and me thrives,
> What is between me and the worlds may fall to ruin.
> If Your love for me is true, then all the rest is easy,
> And everything upon this earth is only earth.[329]

Without a doubt, people of sincerity look only at what is between them and their Creator, not at what is between them and creatures. So if you wish to be free of your ego's desires, be concerned with what is pleasing to your Lord and not the praise or blame of those who might see in you what they love or what they hate. *Peace.*

---

[328] By which he means himself.

[329] See footnote 182.

⁂

LETTER 157

The litany and "the breezes from your Lord"

NOTHING BEFALLS PEOPLE—by which I mean, nothing [spiritually] ruins the one who is ruined—except from a direction which he knows. Every one of them truly knows that what they need is to practice what they know and not [simply to have] knowledge. Someone who is unaware of this thinks that what he needs is knowledge [alone], but that is not the case. In fact, it is the opposite. The great master, Sīdī Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh said in his *Ḥikam* [107]: "It is not feared that the ways leading to God be confusing to you; but rather, it is feared that passion overcome you."

So beware of this, and be always open to the breezes of your Lord,[330] and do not slack off in the practices of your Ṭarīqa as we see many of you doing, for Divine sustenance comes to the measure of receptivity as the *Ḥikam* says, "The arrival of sustenance is in accordance with receptivity, while the raying-out of lights is in accordance with the purity of the innermost being," [113] and "Only the ignorant man scorns the recitation of the litany. Inspiration is to be found in the Hereafter, while the litany vanishes with the vanishing of this world; but it is more fitting to be occupied with something for which there is no substitute," [112] and "The part of your life that has gone by is irreplaceable, and that which has arrived is priceless."[209]

The litany is a means that goes from the servant to the Lord and inspiration is a divine gift from God to His servant. You must truly be open to receiving the spiritual breezes of your Lord, which includes being on guard against what hardens the heart: too much talk, too much food, and too much contact with people. Outwardly, be always humble, which means to stay away from anything that leads to pride and arrogance. In no way should you imitate the ways of the arrogant, but rather keep to the way of humility, cleanliness, lowliness, contentment with what you have, and other such virtues. *Peace.*

---

[330] See footnote 297.

LETTER 158

Proper comportment with God; *sunna* practices

PROPER COMPORTMENT (*al-adab*) is essential for every person of sound mind[331] and only a person who has lost his senses is exempted from this obligation.

The Sufis say:

> The comportment of the servant is self-abasement
> And this comportment he never abandons.
> When his self-abasement is perfect and complete,
> He attains to love and draws near.

They also say, "Make your practice like salt and your comportment like flour,"[332] and other similar things. He who is without proper comportment—assuming he is of sound mind—has strayed from the Path even if a vision of the immensity of the Divine Essence has effaced him from self-consciousness. For absence and presence are two modes of perfection for the people of the Path ؓ and no one knows what they truly are except someone who has attained them. For someone who has not, he might reach a state of absence but not of presence, or a state of presence but not absence, for these are opposites and they do coincide except in a person who is following in the footsteps of the Messenger of God ﷺ.

Perfect comportment for you, O *faqīr*, is to be inwardly the Truth and outwardly the Law, without one taking precedence over the other. Such was the state of the Prophet ﷺ and the perfected saints ؓ. Do not let yourself be deluded by someone in whom the Truth has overcome the Law—and they are many—or by one in whom the Law has overcome the Truth—and they too are many. And if you should say, "There is no one on earth except the one in whom either the Truth has overcome the Law or vice versa," I would say that blessing will continue to exist on earth as long as the earth exists and no one is excluded from it except someone who has a bad opinion [of God][333]and who does not lower his head to the people of the Way.

---

[331] The meanings of *al-adab* include "good manners" and "being polite." For the Sufis it means acting in accordance with the essential state of being God's servant.

[332] A saying attributed to Ruwaym, meaning a great deal of virtuous comportment before God and human beings along with a small amount of religious practice is sufficient.

Correct comportment towards God, towards God's Messenger ﷺ, and towards all Muslims is absolutely essential—and may God give life to the one who gives life the path, and allow us to die among the people of realization! We have seen in our region the great master ᶜAbdallāh al-Sharīf, grandfather of the *shurafā'* of Ouazzane, give life to the path with a clear and easy *sunna* of the Messenger of God ﷺ ,which consists in feeding visitors a simple porridge of ground barley, wheat, or corn, cooked with water, salt, and a little oil or butter.[334] It is not good for the *faqīr* to have many appetites, but rather to turn away from his appetites, and not good for him to eat to repletion, even if he were eating only grass! If there were any good in eating to repletion, then our Prophet ﷺ would have done so, and yet (it is recorded that) he would not eat his fill for two days running. This is something well-known to both the elect and the generality (of Muslims) and if anyone says otherwise, he is in error regarding the Muhammadan *sunna*. A person who follows the *sunna* does not despair, does not find fault, and is never distant from what is good. Such is my belief and I will follow it until I meet my Lord. A judgment is not made based on an exception, but rather on what is most common.

We have also seen a clear *sunna* from the practices of God's Messenger ﷺ established by our master, and that is the practice of *tajrīd* which he himself kept and as did the People of the Porch, who were the Companions of God's Messenger ﷺ and the most beloved.[335] Our master ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb ﵁ and others shared in this practice during their lives. [ʿUmar] himself was a man detached from the workaday world even though he worked in it, and who worked in it even in his state of detachment, concerned only with what God Most High prohibited, and he is enough of an example for any who would either remain in the workaday world or withdraw from it.

---

[333] See footnote 133.

[334] To this day, it is not uncommon for families in Morocco to prepare extensive feasts for groups of *fuqarā'* who come to their homes for evenings of *dhikr*. The Shaykh has already commented on *takalluf* a number of times.

[335] "The porch" (*al-ṣuffa*) refers to the porch outside the Prophet's mosque where the poorest of the Companions, including the famous Abū Hurayra ﵁, would spend much of their days. According to one view, the word "*ṣūfī*" has a linguistic

Thus, he who criticizes *tajrīd* as a way or criticizes working for a living as a way is criticizing the *sunna*, and he who finds that *tajrīd* is too heavy for him to follow is saying this about the way of the Companions ﵃.

In addition to these two great and well-known practices, we have also seen another clear *sunna* that was practiced by the greatest of our *shurafā'*, our master Idrīs ibn Idrīs ibn ʿAbdallāh al-Kāmil ﵁, which was to carry out some kind of manual labor from the time of early morning until the afternoon, but outside the city of Fes, not inside.[336] These are examples we have seen. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 159

To a *faqīh* who treated a Sufi harshly

KNOW, MAY GOD be merciful to you, that I have tried my hardest to know who among people is truly destitute, but the only thing I found to be true is what the Messenger of God ﷺ said, "Injustice hides beneath every wing,"[337] and only God Most High is perfect.

I used to believe that learned people did not wrong others and that if they saw someone wronging another, they would hasten to protect and help the one who was being wronged, for they knew that God was watching over them and they feared none other than He. But you, O *faqīh*, have proven to be among the most unjust, prideful, and arrogant of

---

connection to *ṣuffa*.

[336] The Shaykh means here that Mūlay Idrīs II, who was the ruler of Morocco at the time, would spend half his day doing some sort of manual labor as an exercise in humility, and for that reason he would go where he was not recognized.

[337] We did not find this as a *ḥadīth* in our sources, but rather as a saying often quoted by people to express the fact that we all bear the potential to wrong others.

people. Do you not know that every warning mentioned in the Qur'ān is directed towards the unjust? That every curse is against them? Do you not know that to gain mastery over the ego is precisely the work of the people of knowledge and faith while the opposite is the concern of those who are ignorant and lacking in their faith? Do you not know that blessing is only in clemency (*al-rifq*)[338] and in seeking refuge in God, not in harshness and being heedless of the Presence of our Guardian Lord (be He blessed)? Do you not know a believer is someone who will always look for ways to excuse another's faults? That he will find seventy excuses for his brother's mistake?[339] Do you not know that the people of knowledge [should] have the greatest share of the attributes of the Prophets (God's blessings and salutations of peace be upon them) and that they have inherited their attributes and their traits from the Prophets? I ask you by God if you have ever heard of our great imams Mālik ﵁, or al-Shāfiᶜī, or al-Ḥanbalī, or al-Ḥanafī—with the majesty of their ranks and high positions—having plucked out the beard of any Muslim?[340] Or was there no one in their time that deserved what has come to pass in your time? I ask you by God whether God commanded you to do such a thing or whether what you did came from your ego? By God, God Most High never commanded such a thing. Rather, He has enjoined upon us its opposite, saying *Call unto the way of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation. And dispute with them in the most virtuous manner* [16:125] and *Go, both of you, unto Pharaoh! Truly he has rebelled! Yet speak unto him gently, that haply he may remember or have fear.* [20:43]. God is greater! This was to Pharaoh, may God curse him, someone who had claimed for himself divinity, and yet God Most High commanded His Prophets Moses and Aaron (God's blessings and salutations of peace be upon them) to speak to him with gentle words. So what about a poor and weak believer? A learned man who is a *sharīf* and a Sufi? You have gone to extreme lengths to hurt and insult him and of this you are not ashamed either before God or His creatures? God is greater! Where are you in respect to religious knowledge and where is knowledge in respect to you? It is as distant from you as the two rising places of the sun! May God have mercy upon the one who said to someone like you, "We could never reach the station of Pharaoh, may God curse him, regardless of our sins, and you will never reach the station of the Messenger of God our master Moses ﵇, regardless of your obedience."

---

[338] See footnote 317.

[339] A saying quoted in Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab al-Īmān* (8113) and other collections attributed to Jaᶜfar al-Ṣādiq states, "If there comes to you something about your brother of which you disapprove, try to find an excuse for it and think of seventy ways to explain it until you find a way to excuse it, and if you do not, then say, 'Perhaps he has some excuse of which I am unaware'."

[340] See footnote 309.

Perhaps you have knowledge about this matter that we do not possess. If that is the case, then give it to us in charity and may God reward you for that. But if you do not, then turn to your Lord in repentance and concentrate on your own faults. It would also not hurt if you were to rid yourself of your appetites and all the rest of your ego's desires and designs. Then you could be concerned with helping people to be rid of theirs. But if you attempt this before having purified your own self, it will not avail you, nor will it be accepted of you. Rather, it will be refused and thrown back in your face. As the Book of God Most High states: *Will you enjoin piety upon mankind, and forget yourselves, while you recite the Book? Do you not understand?* [2:44] Or as the poet put it so well:

O you who encourage the teaching of others—
Are you not yourself in need of teaching?
Do not forbid vices that you yourself practice.
Your fault in doing so is enormous.
Rather, begin with your own self in prohibiting sins
And if you manage to do so, you are a sage!
Then will you be heard when you preach to others
And by your actions they'll be guided and will benefit. [341]

While another said:

How can you want to be called a wise man
When you follow whatever you wish for in hot pursuit
And spend your time in play and laughter,
Piling up sins without repentance?

If God guides you to help others rid themselves of their sins, then begin with your own family, then your neighbors, then the people of your land, and then others who are in a situation similar to yours. Help them to rid themselves of the greater sins first, then the lesser sins afterwards, for there is no use in being rid of lesser sins without first being rid of the greater ones. But are there really no other major sins [to remedy] than what ᶜAbd al-Qādir did?[342] In fact, there are many sorts of strange sins and disgraceful behavior, and yet the only faults you see are those of the Sufis.

---

[341] These lines are attributed to Abū al-Aswad al-Du'alī. The better-known line that begins this quote is, "O you—a man who is a teacher of others.."

Do you not know that the Messenger of God ﷺ said, "The Muslim is someone from whom the Muslims are safe (*salima*) from his tongue and his hand."[343] And when he was asked, "Who is an emigrant?" He replied. "Someone who migrates away from evil and avoids [returning to] it."[344] And he said ﷺ, "It is not lawful for a Muslim to gesture towards his brother with an injurious look."[345] And he said, "It is not lawful for a Muslim to frighten a Muslim."[346] And also, "Verily God hates harm to be done to a believer."[347] And also, "He who pardons the mistakes of a believer, his mistakes will God pardon on the Day of Judgment."[348] And also when the Prophet ﷺ asked his companions ﵃, "Do you know for whom God has forbidden the fire?" They answered, "God and His Messenger know." He answered, "The one who is easy, lenient, soft, and near."[349]

---

[342] Presumably, this is the name of the *faqīr* who was insulted by the authorities.

[343] *Ḥadīth* in Bukhārī, Muslim, and many other main sources.

[344] This *ḥadīth* with various wordings appears in Bukhārī, Abū Dāwūd, Nasāᶜī, and other main sources.

[345] Quoted in al-Ghazālī, II:15 and narrated by Ibn Mubārak in *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 676, with the wording, "It is not lawful for a Muslim to show harshness to his brother by way of a hurtful glance."

[346] Abū Dāwūd, Tirmidhī, and Aḥmad, and many other main sources.

[347] Ibn Mubārak in *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 679, with the wording, "Let not two of you speak privately to one another excluding a third, for that is hurtful to a believer and verily God hates for a believer to be hurt."

[348] *Sunnan* collections of Abū Dāwūd, Ibn Mājah, Bayhaqī, *Muʿjam al-Awsaṭ*, of Ṭabarānī, and other sources.

[349] Ṭabarānī, *al-Awsaṭ*, and with similar wording in Ṭabarānī, *al-Kabīr*, Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab al-Īmān*, al-Kharā'iṭī *Makārim al-akhlāq*.The word "near" in this context might also be rendered "approachable and open."

And hear the counsel of one of the scholars who practiced what he knew (may God be pleased with them all) to a certain king: "I advise you to treat the Sufi with goodness and not to think badly of him. If he is sincere, you will benefit from him, and if he is lying, God will benefit you because of your intention." Hear too my advice to someone similar to yourself: "In respect to the people of God (the Sufis) whoever they are: if you yourself have a goodly portion (of this world), then be generous to them out of it for the sake of God Most High, and if you do not, then leave them alone but be very careful regarding them."[350]

Advice is for the sake of God. If you accept it, then may God bless you, and if not, still the matter belongs neither to you, nor to me, nor to anyone in creation but rather to God, Lord of the Worlds. *Peace.*

LETTER 160

Warning *fuqarā'* against having circles of invocation in the marketplaces

I STRONGLY URGE you to give spiritual training to anyone who takes you as a teacher. I have given you permission to do so just as I was given permission by my master, and by my Lord, be He glorified, and by the Messenger of God ﷺ. Know, dear brother, the excellence of permission (*al-idhn*) and its mystery and power. Do not be ignorant of this, for the one who has been given permission has been given a trust. He is guaranteed by God and His Messenger ﷺ and by the masters of the Ṭarīqa. Be aware of this, rely on it, and do not be ignorant of it. Be firm in training the servants of God and do not be intimidated by anyone, as I have been, in respect to God's right—and there is neither strength nor power but through God .

I also strongly urge you to keep the *fuqarā'* from making circles of invocation in the marketplaces. Is it not enough for them to have circles of invocation elsewhere? Have they seen anyone else do this or heard about it happening in no matter what age? No, because, by God, there have never been circles of invocation in the marketplace which is a place for buying and selling. Those circles are for other "marketplaces" which are free of buying and selling and all other distractions. What I am saying here is essential: tell them to turn away from that practice and to seek refuge in the citadel of the Muhammadan *sunna* from the devils among jinn and human beings instead of building bridges for them. Do they not know that this world is full envy and have they not heard the words of God, *And do not, with your own hands, cast yourselves into ruin* [2:195].[351] It is essential that you warn them against things which might harm them, and if they are accept your warning, then may God bless you. Otherwise, just stay clear of them. God is best informed concerning them.

---

[350] Because doing harm to one of God's saints may bring harm upon the doer. See also footnote 379.

Know (may God be merciful to you) that for forty-four years the only disapproved of things or problems I have seen have come to me because of [*the fuqarā'*], for they expose themselves to afflictions. I would warn them about this, but they would not heed my warnings, and as a result, some were put in prison, some were flogged, some fell ill, and some died. All this happened due to their bad comportment, and God is a warrant for what I say. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 161

Aspire only to God

IF YOU ARE absolutely certain that God Most High created you for nothing else but Him, and that no one can benefit you or harm you except Him, then you will stop being distracted from Him by anything else, even by the obedience you accomplish or by the sin you might commit. So let your aspirations (may God have mercy upon you) be higher than the world and its desires, and even higher than Heaven and its delights—*Allāh*! *Allāh*! He is the destination and there is no one who can tell us otherwise. *Peace.*

---

[351] This verse is often quoted in Morocco to this day to warn someone against doing something foolish which could result in financial loss, injury, or death.

LETTER 162

The example of the People of the Porch (*ahl al-ṣuffa*)

OUR WAY IS the love of God. May God make us among those He will shade on the Day when there will be no shade except His shade![352] We would like you to be always open to the breezes of the spirit from God.[353] This you can do by immersing your movements and rests in the invocation of your Lord as we have instructed you, and also by way of love for the Sufis, showing them excellence always. Our Prophet ﷺ would not find rest with anyone as much as he would with the People of the Porch.[354] They were his Companions and the most beloved of people to him for they had no means of living and nothing which distracted them from their Lord. In their example, every disciple can be encouraged in the way of *tajrīd*. Their clothes were so patched that they would not always cover their bodies completely, and so the one who led them in the Prayer would not stand in front of them, fearing that his nakedness would show, but rather pray in the same row with them. Their situation is clear, known by all. So draw near, dear sir, to what your Prophet and beloved friend ﷺ drew near to and flee that from which he fled—and may God take you by the hand.

I would also strongly advise you not to listen to what those who do not fear God have to say concerning the people of Way, for I see them doing nothing except opposing the *sunna* by way of innovation, not opposing innovation by way of the *sunna*. Part of the *sunna,* dear sir, is to be with the needy and the weak, the orphans, the strangers, and the people who are near God whoever they may be, to love them, show goodness towards them, and aid them. *Peace.*

---

[352] He is referring to the well-known *ḥadīth* in Bukhārī, and Muslim, and all other main sources that reports that the Prophet ﷺ said, "There are seven whom God will shade in His shade on the Day when there is no shade but His: a just leader; a youth who grows up worshipping God; a man whose heart is attached to the mosque from the time he leaves it until the time he returns to it; two men who love one another for the sake of God such that their meeting and parting is for God; a man who remembers God in solitude and his eyes overflow with tears; a man who is called to lie with a woman of beauty and wealth and says, 'I fear God'; and a man who gives charity in secret so that his left hand knows not what his right hand spends."

[353] See footnote 297.

[354] See footnote 335.

⁂

LETTER 163

The possibility of seeing God

THERE IS NO difference of opinion among the learned that people will see their Lord in Heaven; a sound *ḥadīth* affirms this.[355] As for seeing Him while still in this world, that is something permissible (*jā'iz*), not proscribed (*mamnūᶜ*)[356] in the view of the people of the *sunna* ﵃. As sufficient evidence they say that were such a vision proscribed, then our master Moses ﷷ would not have asked for it.[357] He was God's Messenger, the one to whom God spoke directly (*kalīm Allāh*), and a Messenger does not ask for what is impossible. A Messenger asks for what is permissible [to believe could happen], for he is infallible (*maᶜṣūm*),[358] and his infallibility keeps him from all that is incorrect.

But no one attains such a vision except after his individual self has been extinguished, effaced, annihilated, eclipsed, and completely gone, as the masters of the Ṭarīqa, those in the East and those in the West, those of earlier times and those of later times, have said. By God, if someone has such a vision, that "someone" goes—everything goes—and only God remains. It is impossible to witness the One and to witness anything else besides Him.

Abū'l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī recounts that it was reported that a man knocked on the door of Abū Yazīd al-Bastāmī,[b] who said, "What do you want?" The man replied, "Abū Yazīd," and he answered, "Abū Yazīd is not in the house." And it is narrated that a man said to Shiblī, "Where is Shiblī?" He answered, "He is dead, and may God not have mercy upon him!" Dhū'l-Nūn al-Miṣrī[b] once sent a man to inquire concerning the spiritual states of Abū Yazīd al-Bastāmī and describe them to him. When the man reached Bastām, he asked where he could find Abū Yazīd and was directed to the mosque. He then went to where he was in the mosque and greeted him. The latter asked, "What do you want?" The man answered, "I want Abū Yazīd," and Abū Yazīd asked in return, "Where is Abū Yazīd? I too have been looking for him!" The man said to himself, "This person is mad. I have travelled all this way for nothing!" When he returned to Dhū'l-Nūn and described what he had found, the latter wept and said, "My brother is gone along with those who are gone in God!" And it was related that Sahl ibn ᶜAbdallāh al-Tustarī[b] said, "For years I have been speaking with God and people have imagined I was speaking with them." In the same sense do they chant:

---

[355] This refers to the *ḥadīth* in the collection of Muslim which begins, "When the people of heaven have entered heaven and the people of the fire have entered the fire...."

[356] That is, it is doctrinally permissible to believe of God, not proscribed.

[357] As Q. 7:143 relates: *And when Moses came to Our appointed meeting and his Lord spoke unto him, he said, "My Lord, show me, that I might look upon You." He said, "You shall not see Me; but look upon the mountain: if it remains firm in its place, then you will see Me."*

[358] It is a tenet of Muslim theology that all the prophets were granted the quality of infallibility (*ᶜiṣma*) in respect to religious questions, while in respect to worldly questions, they erred like other human beings.

> In the past they imagined I was singing their praises
> When it was really You that I meant.

The difference between contemplation and vision, as Shaykh Sīdī Muḥyi al-Dīn Ibn ᶜArabī al-Ḥātimī[b] says in his treatise *al-Yawāqīt wa'l-jawāhir fī bayyān ᶜaqā'id al-akābir*, is that contemplation is preceded by knowledge whereas vision is not.

If someone says, "We see that the people of the station of effacement ﵃, even after having attained effacement, still experience fear and hope,[359] and fear and hope are two attributes of the individual self which was supposed to have died, "I would say, "It is true that they do experience fear and hope, except that whenever fear comes to them, hope also comes to them and vice versa. So they are always between fear and hope. It is not a case of one overcoming the other, and even less a case of their believing they are secure from God's plan or of their despairing of God's Mercy. Such is the state of the Prophets (God's blessings and salutations of peace be upon them) and the state of the perfected saints, may God be pleased with them all.

---

[359] Meaning fear of God's chastisement and hope for God's mercy.

Also, we do not believe that if someone sees his Lord in this world that he will see Him any different in Heaven nor do we believe that after such a vision [in this world] he would be distracted by anything else whatsoever, for anyone who is drowned in contemplating the infinitude of the Divine Essence passes away from his desires, from his worldly life, and [even] from his life in the Next World—and may God curse the one who lies. *Peace.*

LETTER 164

Good character

A *FAQĪR* WHO does pay attention to what he says or does, who craves after what God has forbidden, and does not acknowledge his sins, is not a *faqīr*. He is a donkey (*ḥamīr*)! So take heed (may God be merciful to you)! Beware of what God has prohibited, and avoid both what is forbidden and disapproved. I do not fear for you anything as much as I fear lying and backbiting. This is because I see many of those of whom we have a good impression, and of whom we believe to have blessing and a secret, and who are yet not careful about what they say or do. Instead, they become engrossed in what God has forbidden and do not acknowledge their sins. But a sincere aspirant is never this way nor will he ever be. It is extremely important that you beware of lying and backbiting, and of all that is forbidden and disapproved. Moreover, do not listen to anyone backbiting another. If this should occur and you hear someone backbiting another, hasten to reject it from one who utters it, and rebuke him for it if you can. If he then turns away from this habit, may God bless you, and if not, keep away from him as long as he continues to do it.

In addition, speak of the dead with goodness, as the Prophet ﷺ said, "Mention those of you who have passed away with goodness."[360] Treat one another and all people with respect and modesty, with excellent character, with the best opinion of them, and without cupidity, and avoid being the opposite of these: someone with little modesty, with a bad opinion of people, and with bad character. Also, be as careful as you can about removing any urine that remains [after urination] and have modesty before God, the Messenger of God ﷺ, and before everyone of faith, male or female, jinn and human—and may God take you by the hand. *Peace.*

---

[360] *Ḥadīth* in the *Sunan* of Nasāᶜī, *al-Muṣannaf* of Ibn Abī Shayba, *Kashf al-khafā'*, *Kanz al-ᶜummāl*, and other collections.

LETTER 165

Concerning those who disregard the law

O SHAYKH! Do not expect any good from a disciple who gives no importance to the rules of the Ṭarīqa nor to the religious law as such, regardless of whether he does so intentionally or mistakenly. For the Law brought by Muḥammad ﷺ is the door for anyone who wishes to enter the presence of God, and there is no other. If someone neglects it and wants to enter by some other door, he should not expect to enter. It will never happen. For anyone who wishes to enter [the divine] Presence, to arrive, and to be accepted, it is indispensible to know the rules, to keep them always in mind, and to act according to them.

And know, O shaykh, that I have seen a disciple who had taken one of the masters of the Ṭarīqa as his shaykh and talked about the science of the folk and about the stations of effacement and subsistence—two mighty stations!—and yet [what happened?]. He was contacted by a certain person to travel with him to a place near you, for the sake of God Most High, in order for that man to take care of something he needed to do there. So this disciple went along with him, and when he returned, he took some of the money that the man had entrusted with him as remuneration for having gone with him, regardless of whether the man himself had intended to pay him or not. In other words, after having accompanied him for the sake of God, he took payment for it! So what religion is this? What doctrine? By God, for us, it is worthless. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 166

Avoid being foolish

O *FAQĪR*, FOOLISHNESS belittles you in people's eyes even if you are mature. It weakens you even if you are strong, makes you ugly even if you are beautiful, makes them angry with you even if you are beloved, makes you distant from them even if you are near, and so forth. So turn in repentance to God from it quickly and without hesitation and may God turn to us all in forgiveness. And beware, again, beware of leaving the [straight] path in respect to any servant of your Lord, or of betraying him, cheating him, belittling him, angering him, backbiting against him, or breaking a pact you made with him ....

[On the other hand], being wise magnifies you in their eyes even if you are small, honors you even if you are lowly, beautifies you even if you are ugly, makes you beloved to them even if they are angry with you, and brings you near even if you are distant. And may God be a warrant for what we say. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 167

Good character

ONE OF THE *shurafā'* of Fes, a respected and important person, once insulted me in front of our brethren while I was sitting quietly before him. His anger kept mounting, while I continued to sit quietly without responding to him, and this went on until he finally said to me angrily, "Speak with me! I'm speaking to you!" I said, "I have known the most excellent of people and they have taught me manners. May God reward them with goodness on my account." Then he said to me, "What do you mean?" I said, "If I speak with you, and you are in such a state, I am afraid that I myself will get into the same state, and if this way of talking overcomes us both, what good will be left between us? By God, I see no good in adding my ranting to your ranting." At this, he said to me, "That's what people told me about you: that you were a great *faqīh*," and he began to regret the ill manners that he had shown, fervently beg my pardon, and he went back to loving me with a great love.

Dear brothers, good character—or we could say, noble character—is the Sufism of the Sufis just as it is the religion of the religious, and bad character, foolishness, the lack of modesty, and breaking trusts has no place in religion. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 168

The people of God in the Next World

BY GOD, THE people of God do not aspire to this world or to the Next. They aspire only to the presence of God. I heard my Shaykh, Sīdī ʿAlī ﵇, say, "When the Intercession occurs for the sinners of this community and they are taken out of hellfire and placed in Paradise, they will know one another but not find a certain people either in Paradise or in the Fire. This will bewilder them and they will remain bewildered until their Lord manifests Himself to them and they see Him, all of them, as it has been described in the *ḥadīth* in the sound collections, and they say to God, "Our Lord, we know certain saintly people who dwelt amongst us in the world, and yet they are not here in Paradise nor in the hellfire. Where are they, O Lord, for You know best concerning them." Then will the Lord, sanctified be His Attributes and Names, say: "They are with My guests of honor, for even as they used to worship Me only for My sake alone, so are they with Me now as they were in the world." The evidence for this in the Book is clear in the words of God Most High, *Truly the reverent are amidst Gardens and a stream, upon a seat of truth before an Omnipotent King* [54:54-55]. And in the *sunna* we find that the Prophet ﷺ said, "This world is forbidden to the people of the Next World, and the Next World is forbidden to the people of this world, and both this world and the Next are forbidden to the people of God."[361] May God not forbid us [His Presence], nor forbid it to any who follow us and who are one of us and for us. *Peace.*

---

[361] In *Kanz al-ʿummāl* and Daylamī, *Firdaws.*

⁂

LETTER 169

Letter to those teaching for the sake of God

I WROTE TO certain students of knowledge who taught in Fes al-Bālī: "Peace be upon you. We do not see anyone more elected to the mercy of God than the one who possesses knowledge, nor do we see anyone more in God's good pleasure than the one who is occupied with teaching God's religion and who stays out of what does not concern him. Do not be lazy or weak, do not slacken, and do not leave what you are doing in order to take up some profession, as I see many heedless students do, not to mention the generality of people, for there is no profession greater than teaching knowledge for the sake of God." Then we added, "We would not be averse to your giving a copy of this note to any of those you love." *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 170

Who is a saint?

WHOEVER SUBMITS HIMSELF to God and opposes his desires is one of God's saints, and upon the liar is God's curse. We might also say that whoever sincerely turns to God, all God's creatures or beings call by the tongue of their states, each and every thing calls to him by the tongue of its state, "O you who have turned away from his desires and turned towards his Lord! You who have no beloved one or friend like Him —give me your hand!."

People are heedless of this. They think that it is creation or beings that distract them from their Lord, that cut them off from Him, and prevent them from journeying to Him, and we seek refuge in God from what they think! By God, the reality of the situation is as we have said, wherever you are! By God, by God, by God—whoever reflects deeply on this matter, O people, until he really knows it as we do, will weep for his own soul and for what remains of his life. And may God curse the one who lies concerning Him, and may God curse the one who lies concerning Him, and may God curse the one who lies concerning Him. *Peace.*

LETTER 171

Speak of esoteric knowledge only to those who can understand it

O FAQĪR, I strongly caution anyone who is following me about speaking openly of my knowledge to anyone who is not of the Way. This is the knowledge of the Sufis ﵇ and the people who have possessed it have always careful concerning it and not the spendthrifts we are today. If there is someone who disagrees with my view and does not wish to follow what I am asking, someone who abases or disrespects this knowledge, then I have nothing to do with him nor him with me. Nothing good and nothing substantial will come from such a person (and God knows best). Also, anyone who has ever seen me disrespecting this knowledge should not be misled, for if I did that, I was in serious error and God rebuked me for it.

This is what I say to anyone who follows me and it is the best advice I can give. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 172

Visiting the saints

O FAQĪR, if you are in the city of Fes al-Bālī and you wish to visit the [shrines] of the masters of the Way who are there, then start with Sīdī ibn al-ʿArabī al-Maʿāfirī whose tomb is between the two cities, the old and new, then Sīdī ʿAlī ibn Ḥirzihim, then Sīdī ʿAbdallāh al-Tāwudī, then Sīdī Yūsuf al-Fāsī, then Sīdī Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdallāh, then Sīdī Aḥmad al-Yamānī, then our master, Sīdī ʿAlī al-Jamal, and he is the last of those still there. Then, if you have the resolve, head for Sīdī Abū ʿAlī Baytyūsī, then to Sīdī Abū Yaʿzā[b] in Tāghiya, then to Sīdī Abū Salham[b] on the coast, then to Mūlay ʿAbd al-Salām ibn Mashīsh[b] on Jabal al-Aʿlām, then Sīdī Abū Zayd[b] in the region of the Mazyāta, may God protect it, then to his master, Sīdī Abū Madyan al-Ghawth,[b] in ʿUbbād near Tlemcen ﵇. These saints are many but are unknown except to those who arrive at their station or who stand in their footprints, and none knows that except for a pious scholar endowed with insight. Those saints are almost like Prophets (God's blessings and salutations of peace be upon them) as we have said before, and we repeat our words here intentionally that perchance someone might benefit.

It is very, very important for you to visit these saints throughout your life just as you would visit your parents or others you love. To visit them contains great grace and a clear and well-known mystery, and we have seen this with our own eyes many times—may God be a warrant for what we say. If you wish to know about the excellence of these kinds of visits and their goodness, their blessing, and their benefits, then look at what the Folk have said concerning them, such as in these lines from the saint Abū Sālim, Sīdī Ibrāhīm al-Tāzī,[b] who is buried in Oran ؓ:

To visit the saintly is a way of healing,
a key to the door of guidance and good.

It produces aspiration in a heart that is pure
and expands the breast made narrow by a load of sins.

It aids the oppressed and elevates the nameless,
enriches the penniless, and mends the broken.

It expands the constricted, brings laughter to the weeping,
and lifts the spirit with abounding goodness and reward

So I enjoin it upon you. The folk exclaim its secret
and counsel others towards it both in private and aloud.

How many a sin is plucked from a deep well by the visit
and thrown into the ocean of God's mystery and aid.

How many a distant one is brought near by its attraction
and surprised by a clear opening to goodness.

How many an aspirant has found thereby a master,
wise and well-versed in maladies and their cures,

And then is cast upon them a robe of priceless cloth
Embroidered by good fortune, an opening, and God's help.

So make good your repentance then visit with courtesy,
The courtesy due to kings before the true Sovereign.

And make no difference between the methodic and the teacher,
The ecstatic, the living saint or the one in the tomb,

The ascetic, the devotee—all of them are blessed
but even so the sun is not like the moon.

So to visit the Prophets is the best of all visits,
and they too vary in their stations and degrees:

The best of creation is Aḥmad (our Prophet) and so the best
For the gnostics to head towards in hardship and ease.

And of his community, the Illuminated Companions are best
And most excellent among them, his companion Abū Bakr.

Then after him Farūq, Abū Ḥafṣ, God's pleasure—
According to the orthodox, glistening comets in the sky.

Be silent before what they say of the lion, my sublime brother,
ᶜAlī, and ᶜUthmān the martyred father of ᶜAmr.

And they say that their merit follows the order in which they
ruled.

I have completed my verse about the visited and the visitor
To the prophets of God and His Messengers

And their seal, may the purest salutations be upon him forever,
And upon those near him, and the noble companions

And those who follow, in piety, in goodness, patience and
thanks.

Peace

⁂

LETTER 173

An encounter at the shrine of Mūlay Idrīs in Fes

AMONG THE MIRACULOUS gifts that my Lord gave me was when I went one day to the tomb of Mūlay Idrīs the younger[b] in Fes al-Bālī to offer the Friday Prayer. I found the mosque completely full of people except the place where the caretaker sits who had gone to use the lavatory. So I sat down in that spot and suddenly there was man from the countryside speaking to me furiously (may God grant us peace!)

while I kept quiet and did not respond to him in any way. But his rage continued and the imam, who was the great scholar Sīdī Abū ᶜAbdallāh Muḥammad Bennānī[b] (may God have mercy upon him)[362] had taken his seat on the *minbar*, the muezzins were giving the call,[363] and people had fallen silent, but since his anger was not subsiding, I said to him, "When the person who sits here comes, he can either let me sit here or kill me!." This only made him angrier, so much so that I was afraid he was going to strike me with a knife, when there appeared the great and noble Sīdī Abū ᶜAbdallāh al-Ghālī (may God have mercy upon him) who had come to offer the prayer, and sat himself down squarely upon the angry countryman in clear view of everyone and would not budge until the man stood up from under him and set about leaving the area under the dome where he had been. Then the person whose place (I had sat in) returned from making the ablution and we made a place for him in an easy and polite way. We offered the Prayer, and afterward (the man who had been angry with me) came to me and begged my pardon. For the *muqaddam*[364] that day was Sīdī Abū ᶜAbdallāh Muḥammad Aghyūl, may God be merciful to him, one of the great ascetics (of Fes) to whom neither the generality nor the elect could say a word, and it was he who had asked the man to watch his place. May God be a warrant for what we say, this was the first miraculous gift[365] that my Lord gave me. *Peace.*

---

[362] *Salwat al-anfās* gives the year of Sīdī Muḥammad Bennānī's death as 1194/1780, a year after the Shaykh's death. If the formula "May God have mercy upon him" (*raḥimahu-l-Lāh*), generally used in speaking of the deceased, is used in this context, then we can assume it was inserted by someone who copied the letters.

[363] Following the Mālikī rite, after the imam is seated on the *minbar* (a raised seat roughly equivalent to the pulpit of a church), there are three successive calls to prayer given for the Friday Prayer.

[364] The term is used here to mean the person who offers the Prayer directly behind the imam and repeats in a loud voice the imam's utterances which mark the different positions of the Prayer.

[365] The word he uses here and in a number of letters which follow this is *karāma* which is sometimes translated as "miracle" (and is related to the English word "charisma"). A more exact rendering in the context of these letters, however, would be an event through which God honors (*yukrimu*) or shows His generosity to anyone He loves. See also our introduction concerning these events.

⁂

LETTER 174

A vision while teaching children.

I WAS TEACHING children in the ʿUyūn neighborhood of Fes,[366] reciting the Qur'ān as the children recited with me from their tablets (*alwāḥ*)[367] seated before me, when I found myself in a boat at sea near the city of Tunis (may God protect it) and I was reciting the Qur'ān as I had been doing in front of the children and all who were on the boat were made joyful by my recitation. Then suddenly there were numerous boats of the Christians bearing down upon us to take us captive, and all who were on the boat clung to me as if for them I was one of God's true saints. Then God covered my attributes with His Attributes and my traits with His Traits[368] and I headed the boat in the direction of their boats and surrounded them with my power and divine aid such that some of them sank, some broke into pieces, and some were captured, and God is the Victor over all things. Then I found myself back in my schoolroom and felt like someone who was ill or who had been under a spell, my bones aching as if someone had beat me with hammers.[369] (Later) I went to my master and told him what had happened and he placed his hand over his mouth, then smiled and said, "Yes indeed ... you never know where the station of the *quṭb* will appear. Will it be in the mountains herding goats, or will it be in a little schoolroom teaching children?" After this, news arrived of what had happened,[370] and may God's curse be upon those who lie. *Peace.*

---

[366] Near Bāb Semmarīn in southern part of the Fes al-Jadīd.

[367] *Alwāḥ* is the plural of *lawḥ,* a tablet made of wood, usually cedar, on which a portion of the Qur'ān or other taditional text to be memorized is written. Learning with the *lawḥ*, although much rarer than in times past, continues to this day in Morocco.

[368] He is describing this experience with the words of the *Ḥikam* 130, quoted in letter 13.

[369] *Mirāzib*, plural of *mirzaba*, a small hammer used by stone masons.

[370] It is unclear from the text what he means by "what happened."

LETTER 175

A vision at the beginning of the Way

I BEGAN IN the Way at the time when the navy began in Morocco, started by the great and noble ruler, Sīdī Abū ᶜAbdallāh Muḥammad ibn ᶜAbdallāh ibn Ismāᶜīl al-Ḥasanī al-ᶜAlawī (may God be pleased with him). That was in the year 1182 AH[371] and it was a time when in everything I saw, I saw the existence of the Messenger of God ﷺ and I would see the presence of God in the presence of the Messenger of God, and the presence of the Messenger in the presence of God, but as for creation, I was absent to it and did not perceive it at all. And God is a warrant for what I say. *Peace.*

LETTER 176

The *faqīr* with a patched shirt

ONE NIGHT MY soul said to me, "The outward and the inward of those who are not like your outward and inward have no value." I passed this on to the *fuqarā'* after the dawn prayer and I saw that one of them facing me was wearing a long patched shirt (*qashāba*) exactly like mine, without one feature missing or added, because on the lower part my shirt was a new round patch, while the shirt itself was old. The evening before, however, that *faqīr's* shirt had not been like that. Then it had become like mine but without having been changed or altered. And God is the warrant for what I say. *Peace.*

LETTER 177

The verse on a tablet

A CERTAIN MAN from among our brethren in Fes (may God deliver them from all harm) invited me to the *khatim*[372] for his son in Minya so

---

[371] That is, 1768 CE. The Shaykh would have been 29 or 30 years old. The Alaoui ruler, Mohamed ibn ᶜAbdallāh, was successful in defeating an attempt by the French to take the port of Larache by sea in 1765.

[372] *Khatim*, closing or seal, is a ceremony to mark when a child completes the mem-

I went with some of the *fuqarā'* who were following the way of *tajrīd* and no one else. We found the house completely full of people and students (*ṭulba*) were writing for the boy as is the custom with the people of our land. When we entered the house, the boy got up from where he was among the people and offered me his tablet, so I turned towards him and took the tablet, and then said to everyone in the house, the generality of people and the elect, showing them the tablet but not looking at what was written on it, and with all of them looking at me, "Look, O people of faith, and see if the way we are following,"—and all of us were following the way of *tajrīd*—"is true or false?" And on the tablet, the verse that had been written was: *It is they who act upon guidance from their Lord, and it is they who shall prosper* [2:5]. People marveled at this—both the generality and the elect—and everyone in the house was impressed by what had happened. May praise and thanks be to God. *Peace.*

⁂

Letter 178

The First and the Last, the Inward and the Outward

I WAS STANDING in prayer in the last third of the night and invoking the Supreme Name, *Allāh*, for I had learned the method of doing this from what I had found in one of the books of the great shaykh al-Shādhilī ﵁. I had also been taught a method by my master that was easier and more correct, and God knows best, and that was to visualize the five letters of the Name before my eyes as I invoked it, without superimposing them on a wall or a stone—only picturing them before my eyes.[373] Every time I would lose sight of them, I would return to them, and if I lost sight of them a thousand times or more in one hour, I would return to them each time. This brought about for me a deep state of contemplation in which there would come to me a flow of

---

orization of either a portion of or the entire Qur'ān.

[373] This extra instruction is not included in the description of this method in Letter 13, but it is an important addition. The Shaykh did not want those who tried to follow this method to mentally attach the Name to any particular place or object.

inspired knowledge, but I would not try to hold on to any of it, just let it go, for in that way the human aspect diminishes and the luminous spiritual aspect grows stronger. That night, however, [the state] came to me with the saying of the God Most High, *He is the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward* [57:3] and I said to it, "As for *the First and the Last and the Inward*, this I truly know. But as for *the Outward*, all I see outwardly are existing things." Then it said to me, "If the meaning of His words *the Outward* was other than what you see, then that would be inward, not outward. But I say to you, *the Outward and the Inward* ." Thus did (this meditation) overpower me and subdue me by its Divine help until I had no more to say to it, for there was no proof left for me against it: I realized that there was nothing in existence except God and nothing in the cosmos other than Him. May praise and thanks be to God!

When I went to my teacher and informed him of what had happened, he was very happy and joyful for me, and then began speaking to me of the special meaning of *tawḥīd* without reticence, and would often quote the words of the realized saint, Sīdī al-Shushtarī ﵁[b]:

> You, You, You—You, You, You!
> The Lover, the Beloved, and their Union
> are You,

[And also]:

> How much of my life passed me by, how much time,
> Always wishing to know what and for whom,
> Until the day I saw what I truly am:
> My Beloved I had not known before.

And he would also quote the shaykhs of the Way in the East ﵁:

> I was in doubt and You were my highest proof:
> I am You if you understand the meaning
> Why am I absent from You
> When I know how You see me?

[And also]:

Before today I was bound to the duality,
Veiled by the illusion that my oneness was two.
Then Your beauty appeared, error vanished,
I saw myself with my own two eyes

And became the essence of the essence itself.
All that is beauty is the beauty of God.
Of this, there is no doubt
Except for the suspicious whom doubt has overcome.

O you who drink at the spring,
if you realized it all doubt would vanish:
The Attributes are none other than the Essence Itself,
In truth there is no place for doubt.

Peace.

⁂

LETTER 179

When his shaykh removed his headcloth

WHEN MY MASTER saw my sincerity for the Way, he told me to break my ego's habits, saying "For us, just as we acquire the knowledge of the Truth, we acquire its practice." But I did not understand what he meant. Then he took hold of my headcloth (*ḥā'ik*) with his noble hand and pulled it off my head, leaving my head bare, then twisted it all up, and put it around my neck, saying to me, "There's a good fit!" This evoked in me such a shock that at that moment it would have been easier for me to die than to be seen in that state, and he himself was looking at me without speaking until my soul was ready to die from the weight of it all.[374] I rose before the Shaykh did, which was something I never did, and hurried out to where the wall of the zāwiya would hide me from him. Then my soul said to me, "What does it mean that I am like this?" and I had no answer except that I needed to put the cloth back on my head as anyone would. But I did not. Rather I said to myself, "The Shaykh knows what this means. Why should you be so terrified, shocked, and repulsed to appear so humble? What are you and what standing do you have that you cannot accept this state? Or is it that you cannot be happy unless you are left to your desires and the things you love unbounded by any limits? No, by God, you are not going to be made happy by that nor shall you have it as long as I know who you are and know your storehouse of tricks!" Then it gave up pursuing its desires as it had been doing for it realized that it would not have them at all. It had seen me red-eyed with anger at it, and it gave in to me as I wanted it to do. The ultimate state of being forsaken is for the disciple to see the form of his ego clearly and then not to strangle it until it dies. *Peace.*

---

[374] See footnote 128.

⁂

LETTER 180

When he removed his prayer cap

IT WAS A FRIDAY and I was sitting in the first row at the Andalous Mosque, then I took off my prayer cap and I left my head bare. People were looking at me from every side because it was not my normal state before them to do something like that, and because of that my ego was so filled with shame that it became like a leech when you put salt on it.[375] Then my ego spoke to me saying, "What have you gained by doing this or have you just dishonored yourself?" I said to it, "I have gained the knowledge of you. I did not use to know you, did not know your form, and now I have come to know it, and by God, this is the only way I am going to be with you: this state to which you have so much aversion." And when it saw me red-eyed [with anger], and gave up expecting me to give it anything except what it hated, what weighed heavily upon it, and what it found repulsive, it left me totally, and when it left, it took with it all its turbidity and left me only with a great and almost unequalled clarity. Then there came to me God-given knowledge as abundant as the waves upon the sea, such that had the learned of the east and the learned of the west gathered to question me, I would have been able to answer each one of them without having to refer to what I had already said. For I had become, by God, like a lamp, and after each of them had lit from me his own lamp, or his own wick, my light would still not have been diminished a bit but would have stayed as bright as ever.

---

[375] Leeching (*al-taᶜlīq*) as a medical procedure is described in part IV of the Canon of Medicine by Avicenna (Ibn Sinā'), point 1039, including how to remove them with "salt, pepper, snuff, ashes, niter, or burnt bristles..." all of which makes the leech contract and fall off. This procedure is still used in traditional healing in Morocco.

That is how I was—and God is warrant for what I say. Surely, all people contain within themselves as many spiritual insights as there are waves upon the sea, but the sensory world takes control of them, takes control of their hearts and limbs, and leaves them *deaf, dumb, and blind,* [*so*] *they do not understand* [2:171]. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 181

The incident concerning the zāwiya of Sīdī ᶜAbdallāh al-Aghzāwī

I WAS TEACHING children in Fes al-Bālī and the schoolroom where we were had gotten very hot, for this was in the summer. Nearby, however, was a zāwiya that was cool, beautiful, and had lots of fountains of flowing water. So I said to the children, "The zāwiya of Sīdī ᶜAbdallāh al-Aghzāwī is a better place for us, (and God knows best!)." They answered me, "But there is a pious woman there and with her are women from among the people of Fes including the sister of the judge Sīdī ᶜAbd al-Q̱ādir ibn Akhrīṣ," who was in charge of that district. I said to them, "The people of this neighborhood will remove them from the zāwiya—her and the ones with her." The children responded, "She is not going to leave." I said, "If she does not leave, she will be leaving for the cemetery," and I motioned powerfully with my hand in the direction of the cemetery. That was at the time of sunrise, and it had come to pass that she had passed away at that same time without having been ill and was buried (may God have mercy upon her and us).[376] *Peace.*

---

[376] A zāwiya is normally considered public space. If women were going there regularly, however, the implication is that they would probably remove their jellabas and scarves and the zāwiya would then become women's space which a male such as the

LETTER 182

Pre-emption (*al-shufaᶜa*)

I WAS BUYING a piece of land in the Kirān quarter (of Fes) with the intention of building a second zāwiya there as well when there came to me a man from that neighborhood who said, "A certain person there is saying that if you try to buy that land, he is going to pre-empt the sale.[377]" I told the man, "Please tell him that if he pre-empts this sale, the angel ᶜAzrā'īl عليه السلام [378] will pre-empt him!" That was said at sunset and that man had been physically well with nothing wrong, for I had [seen him] pass me in the road, both as I was walking to that property and coming back from it. But before the time of the dawn prayer, he had indeed been pre-empted by our master ᶜAzrā'īl عليه السلام, and what I had said would happen, happened. May God have mercy upon him and me. *Peace.*[379]

LETTER 183

The villagers who had intended harm towards the *fuqarā'*

ONCE I WAS offering supererogatory prayers at the shrine of Sīdī ibn Yūsuf (may God benefit us by him) and was feeling great fear that

---

Shaykh could not enter. Many shrines in Morocco are to this day places where women sit together, but since norms have changed, men are able to come in even if there are women inside with their heads uncovered. This incident also demonstrates how a powerful person, at the time, could supersede the rights of the public.

[377] Pre-emption (*al-shufaᶜa*) is a feature of Islamic law which allows a potential heir to a property to have the first right to purchase it and thereby to "pre-empt" any other buyers, even after an agreement and payment have been made. It is possible that the relative wanted to exercise this option simply because he was personally opposed the Sufis. The verbal form, *shafaᶜa*, also means "to intercede."

[378] The angel of death.

[379] A famous *ḥadīth qudsī* found in all the main collections begins, "Anyone who becomes the enemy of My friend, upon him do I declare war." In letters 7, 14, 128, and elsewhere the Shaykh explains how God's defense of His friends comes on the condition that they do not try to defend themselves. It is also said in Morocco that one of the reasons God sometimes hides his saints is so that ignorant people do not knowingly harm them, thereby bringing divine retribution upon themselves.

something was going to befall the *fuqarā'* from the direction of people, for a state of expansion (*basṭ*) had taken hold of them, the time was one of carelessness, along with harshness [from the authorities], and few people were on the side of what was right.[380] When one of the *fuqarā'* came to me in fear to inform me of the very thing I had been expecting to happen, I was reciting *So perform the Prayer and give alms, and hold fast to God. He is your Master. How excellent a Master, and how excellent a Helper* [22:78]. Fear left me and was replaced by hope and great certitude. I said to him, "This situation has passed with no harm to us—but tell me what took place." So he told me that the people of their village had agreed to write a letter [falsely] accusing some of the *fuqarā'* (may God forgive them) of terrible things and then to deliver this letter to the caid, who would then take it to the Sultan, Sīdī Muḥammad ibn ᶜAbdallāh ibn Ismāᶜīl al-Ḥasanī al-ᶜAlawī[b] (may God have mercy on his soul and be well pleased with him).[381] Hearing this, however, did not disturb me. Rather, I felt calm and tranquil until day came and another of the *fuqarā'* came to me more afraid than the first, for I had let [those people who wanted to do us harm] get more and more determined in what they were going to do. This *faqīr* complained to me saying, "Those people are trying to ruin our companions' honor and you are not doing a thing to help us!" I said, "What would you have me do? Turn their village upside down like this?." And I gestured with my hand as if turning something upside down. Just at that moment, a man came running from the village. He had been sent by its people to tell me that they had committed a grave fault. He then went on to say, "A messenger had come from the Pasha ᶜAbd al-Ṣādiq al-Rīfī in Tangier to the caid Aḥmad ibn Nāṣir al-ᶜĪyyāshī in Tāza (may God protect it, and Tangier, and other places) with saddle bags full of fifteen hundredweights of the Sultan's gold, and seventy *mithqāl* [of his own wealth],[382] but he arrived at our village wounded and covered with blood, with both the bags of the Sultan's wealth and his own wealth gone. He told us, 'You are the ones who did this to me because I was in your village when it happened,' and the people of the village had turned white with fear." Then I went to them and I found them as the man had described them or more so and gave thanks to God Who had protected us from their malice. *Peace.*

---

[380] In this context, the state of *basṭ* to which he is referring means exuberance to the point of intoxication. In *Īqāẓ al-himam*, Sīdī Ibn ᶜAjība says in reference to the 80th aphorism of the *Ḥikam*—"He expanded you so as not to keep you in contraction; He contracted you so as not to keep you in expansion; and He took you out of both so that you not belong to anything apart from Him"—"As for the state of expansion, among the actions it requires is to keep the limbs of your body from excess and above all, from the wounds the tongue can inflict. When your soul feels happiness, it may become over exuberant, too energetic, too light, and in this state you may say something [to another] without thinking about it, and fall into the abyss of being cut off from God because of this rudeness. So expansiveness can be a stumbling block, and when the aspirant senses this state, the best thing to do is to rein in the soul with silence, don the raiment of calmness and dignity, go into his or her private place of retreat, and stay there for a time. For the *faqīr* in the state of expansion is like a cooking pot on the fire. If you just leave it there, it will boil over and all the broth will be lost, but if you put out the fire, the broth will remain savory and intact. Such is the *faqīr* in the state of energy and expansion: his light intensifies and heart is collected, but if then he begins to move, and becomes excessively active, and follows his energy wherever it leads him, he will grow cold and be returned to his weakness... And God Most High knows better."

[381] To mention "may God be merciful to him *(raḥimahu'l-Lāh)*" means that this was written after the passing away of Muḥammad ibn ᶜAbdallāh in 1790 CE.

⁂

LETTER 184

The plowshare and pressing need (*iḍṭirār*)

A MAN FROM my family was very needy. He had a small plot of land and was going to plow it using a pair of oxen that someone had lent him against his promise to return them to their owner's house in Banī Aḥmad. It was a day of scorching heat, and there was no one around to help him, and then [as he was plowing] the plowshare had gotten caught in some roots [that had spread underground] from the forest. At first, the man did not notice this and plowed quite a bit of the ground, because it was friable earth. But finally he realized that the blade was missing and so he had to search for it while at the same time holding onto the oxen who were being bothered by flies. He kept this up until his back was worn out[383] and I felt sorry for him, seeing him in such a trying situation, and was overcome by sense of pressing need, along with him, to find the plowshare. So I started to help him look for it. He said to me, "Dear uncle al-Aᶜrabī! If you can find that blade for me, I'm going to give you a big bunch of grapes!" I stood up by God's strength and power, took one step, then reached down into the earth, and there was the plowshare in my hand, just as if it had been there all the time, even though I had just been looking with my eye from row by row and had seen nothing. When that pressing need came over us, ignorance disappeared and there was knowledge; distance disappeared and there was nearness. And God is the warrant for what I say. *Peace.*

---

[382] A *mithqāl* is approximately 4.25 grams of gold or silver.

⁂

LETTER 185

A crying enfant and pressing need (*iḍṭirār*)

MY MATERNAL AUNT came to me carrying a crying infant girl. She said to me, "My brother, I do not know what is wrong with her. [She has been] so much trouble for me. I am at my wit's end with worry and I complain first to God then to you!" I believe that when people turn towards what they venerate, God fulfills their needs there. Some have even said that this takes the place of the Supreme Name. In her eyes and in the eyes of others, I was insignificant, but I wanted her to confront true need when she came to me with her complaint.[384] So I said to her, "Take the child to [the shrine of] Sīdī Aḥmad ibn Yūsuf, place her inside, and then go outside and do not do anything to comfort her, even if you hear her crying, so that God's help may come." She followed my instructions—I watched her as she did—and then she took the child back to my house, and there we found that a large worm had come out of the infant's ear. This was all by means of the veneration she had for the saint and by the mystery of deep and urgent need (*al-iḍṭirār*). And God is a warrant for what I say. *Peace.*

---

[383] Wooden plows, still used in places in Morocco, include a leather strap that goes around the plowman's middle.

[384] We can understand from this that because the aunt knew the Shaykh as family, he knew she could not have the veneration for him that she would for someone else. So he pointed her in the direction of a well-known shrine in the area so that she would do what she was doing with awe, reverence, and respect.

⁂

LETTER 186

The crippled enfant

MY MATERNAL AUNT was taking care of her son's child, a four-year old infant boy who was unable to move the joints of his body and who could only drink milk for nourishment. Both my aunt and others were heavily burdened by caring for him, and he was constantly crying, whether he was being carried or was set down. When they saw his condition, they made a visit to many of the saints' shrines in the area, but they never found an answer to their prayers. Finally they came to me and I prayed to God either to cure him or to take him into His Presence. The following day, the child passed away, and [the people who had been caring for him] rejoiced greatly. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 187

The woman seized by spiritual ecstasy

ONCE I WAS at a dinner among the Banī Zarwāl and there came to me a group of men none of whom had any fear of God. They sat down and each of them was holding a bottle of snuff.[385] They said to me, "If you can rid us of this illness, we will submit to you and serve you!" I said to them, "Give me the bottles of snuff." They handed them to me and I broke them all, and then said to them, "Listen to what I say." They said they would. I then said, "Curse the devil, for this appetite is demonic," and they did. Then I said to them, "Turn to your Lord in repentance from every sin that comes from you and maintain what

---

[385] *Tibgha* is tobacco, but we can understand from the context that it was in the form of snuff which is kept in small bottles made of glass or pewter and was a widespread habit, especially in northern Morocco. Taking snuff still exists in Morocco among certain older people.

God has made obligatory upon you and act upon His words, *Whatsoever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatsoever he forbids to you, forgo* [59:7]." [Eventually], they were subdued, humbled, and fell silent, but not before I was forced to hear from them ugliness such as I had never heard before, for people generally respected me. But one of the men kept talking, saying, "So is it forbidden for us to hear the voice of a woman or not?" because there were women whom I had received into the Ṭarīqa invoking God aloud. I purposefully did not answer him the way he wanted me to answer but rather set him in another direction, saying, "A woman usually invokes God silently, but if she becomes so overwhelmed by love and longing for her Lord that she loses her senses, then there is no ruling of the law that applies to her." Then I added, "If she is lost to her senses, she might even come to you, if God so wills, with her breasts bare, let alone with her voice raised."

Then, what I had just said could happen happened. Listen, O *faqīr*, to what took place without a detail added or missing. There was a woman of the village who loved us for the sake of God, and at that moment, she became lost to her senses, for she had been invoking ceaselessly. A man from her family said, "Put a nail in the fire until it is white hot and then touch it to her skin.[386] If she returns to her senses, then praise be to God, and if not, then just leave her." They did what he said, but she became even more lost to her senses until she came out to where we were, and her *ḥā'ik* fell open so that nothing was holding it on her body except a belt, and the little girl she was carrying fell from her back, yet she was unaware of anything. Then she came to the door of the room we were in but instead of stopping, she went on to the door of the room where the one who had been arguing with me was sitting and he saw with his own eyes [what I had said]. So God confirmed the truth of what I had said and showed the falseness of this man. Praise be to God and thanks.

In fact, an answer to his question had come to me by the generosity of God which was that I should ask him in return: "Is the voice of a woman only illicit [for men to hear] when she is invoking God or invoking blessings upon His Messenger ﷺ and not illicit when she is chatting with others or doing ululations at big dinners such is the custom with the women of your family and others in our land?" But I decided not to answer in this way because I did not want to aid my ego [to dispute with him] and so I answered as I did by the strength and power of God. *Peace.*

---

[386] *Al-kayy*, cauterization, was a pre-Islamic method of treating wounds and illnesses. The Prophet ﷺ permitted it in certain cases and but generally disapproved of it. Its use in treating seizures or mental conditions is mentioned in Ibn Sīnā's Canon.

LETTER 188

The two men who wanted to marry the same woman

TWO MEN, BOTH my brothers in God, wanted to marry the same woman who was a distant relative and I discouraged one of them from this because I saw that the other was the better choice. The first, however, would not give up, so the situation just dragged on, with the two of them disputing about it for nearly two years. Then it came to pass, by the God's power, that we all met one another at the shrine of the one of the saints and I was sick to my heart on their account, since both of them loved me for the sake of God. So I made a prayer there and said, "Dear God, if in Your prior knowledge, this woman is destined to this one, then give her to him, and if to the other, then give her to him." At that moment, I glanced above me, and there I saw a candle burning near the ceiling of the room. I rose quickly and the candle fell into the lap of the one who was the more aggressive of the two without any intent on my part for that to happen—in fact, against my will and my brother's, for it turned out that she was his stepdaughter and he had been asking for her hand just as a way to refuse it to others.[387]

LETTER 189

A powerful state in the mosque

I found myself in the village of Tāyn Tafraḥ and with me was my brother in God, Sīdī Aḥmad al-ᶜArabī. Both of us were in a very powerful spiritual state at that time, for we were invoking God there and a great number of people had gathered around us until the room became full of Qur'ān reciters and villagers, while women and children had gathered behind the mosque. The spiritual state that had enveloped everyone was so powerful that people were moved to tears. This was when my actual brother who frequented [that mosque], said to himself upon seeing the scene before him, "If there is al-ʿArabī my brother, and Aḥmad al-ʿArabī my guardian, then surely my Lord is going to give me a few dirhams!"[388] since at that time he was in debt. Just then, one of the Qur'ān students returned from a journey and placed in his hand all the money he needed, *and God is Possessed of Tremendous Bounty* [2:105; 3:74; 8:29; 57:21,29; 62:4]. *Peace.*

---

[387] As his step-daughter, the girl would not have been lawful for him to marry, so this was actually a kind of game he had been playing. The burning candle falling into his lap was a sign for him that what he was doing was very dangerous.

⁂

LETTER 190

The lost ox

I WAS HEADING to a village in the region of Banī Aḥmad when a man appeared saying to me, "Help me, dear sir!" I asked him what was wrong and he answered that he had an ox which had wandered off. I asked if he had searched for it, and he said he had been searching for a week and two days and still had not found it. It was then the late afternoon and I said to him, "Go to some people tomorrow below the village and they will bring it to you, God willing." He said, "I have already looked there many times." I said, "Do what I say and you will find him before sunrise." This he did and the ox came walking back to him before sunrise as we had said. And God is a warrant for what I say. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 191

Two men who wanted to marry the same woman

THERE WERE TWO men from the Banī Zarwāl and one of them had asked the other for his daughter's hand in marriage, but he refused. I went to [the latter] because he was attached to me [in the Ṭarīqa], but he spoke to me in an insulting way (and this was after having claimed to love me). So I went away waited for some time and then went back to him, but he spoke to me with even harsher words than before. This continued for nearly four years, but in the midst of this there came to me a very strong, overwhelming spiritual inspiration that said to me, "That woman will be for that man." Then [the father] came to me from the Banī ᶜAbdallāh, by the power of the Hearer and the Knower, and consented to give his daughter's hand in marriage to the petitioner, and accepted from him some sweets. Many people heard about this and were amazed, surprised, and incredulous.

---

[388] A *mithqāl* in Morocco at the time was about 28 grams of gold.

⁂

LETTER 192

The man who wanted to flee the authorities

ONE OF OUR brothers in God had been[falsely] implicated in some serious wrong-doing and wanted to flee the area, but I was against it because it would only confirm his guilt [in the eyes of the authorities]. I said to him, "Do not run away. I guarantee your safety." Then a representative of the palace came and arrested many men from the village including him and all of them were punished by being beaten with a rod except him because after they had stretched him out on the ground, a man came to them and swore under oath that that particular man was only a poor man. They let him go—not because he was poor, but rather by the grace of God. And may God curse the liar. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 193

A man who learned the hard way

HE HAD ALSO entered a state of expansiveness[389] and was not coming back from it. Rather it had become so intense that he had almost fallen into what is disapproved and even forbidden. That is when I said to him, "Come back, poor man, from where you are in this benighting truth." But he would not, and even said to me, "There is no *hiya* except *hiya*!" by which he meant there is nothing in existence except the inner truth.[390] I said to him, "By God, if God so wills, He will seize you so tightly with that the truth you are now talking about will come out of your eyes, stretch you out on the rubbish heap, and strike so hard within that you will not be able to catch your breath!" In four days or less, what I said to him came to pass. The caid of the tribe arrived, had him seized just as I had said to him, stretched out in the stable where the Caid's horses were tied, and beaten with a belt. After this, he was sick for some time, but in this way, he was taught a lesson. He was glad of it and so was I. May praise and thanks be to God. *Peace!*

---

[389] It is not clear from the letter to whom the Shaykh is referring, but it is likely that this concerns the man who had escaped punishment as related in the previous letter. See footnote 380 concerning expansiveness (*basṭ*).

⁂

LETTER 194

An incident at a funeral

I WAS AT the funeral for the daughter of a man from among our brethren of the Banī Zarwāl. He and his sons loved me and everyone there was preoccupied by my presence. This I could hear with my ears and see with my eyes. Then a certain person from among the *ṭulba*[391] arrived who, in his own estimation, was among the people of saintliness, for he had visited one of the saints from that time and claimed that he was his shaykh and that he had profited spiritually from him, even though he had a heart that was so foul it nearly rent his skin—and we seek refuge in God from that! But he hid this very well, modestly refusing to acknowledge any goodness on his part, attributing to himself faults instead so that he could appear to be a modest man in the eyes of people who, like him, were inwardly blind. If anyone there loved him, it was more because they disliked me, not because of a sincere love for God.

Finding them in the state they were in, he said to everyone, "There is the one whose jinn has taken control of this house and no one will escape it! It will kill everyone!" and this greatly pleased the people there who were with him.[392] The man whose daughter had died had also lost a son before that, and both of them had loved me (may God have mercy upon them!). I remained silent in the face [of the man's insult] just as I had with others before him. But, at that very instant, God sent a jinn who took possession of that man's daughter, so that she became completely lost and began howling like a wolf, and calling out to me for my help (*tastaghīthu bī*). All the people of the house [I was in]—men and women, old and young—could hear her because the house was nearby them. This state remained with her for nearly a year and a lot of the people of the village told me that her family would put a cloth in her mouth to silence her howling so that they would not be disgraced, for the command and power of God had overwhelmed them. *Peace.*

---

[390] *Al-ḥaqīqa* (Spiritual Truth) is a feminine noun in Arabic, hence the pronoun *hiya*, "she." See footnotes 38 and 100 concerning *al-ḥaqīqatu al-ẓulmāniyya*.

[391] *Ṭulba* in Morocco are men, usually with good voices and amazing memories, who earn their living by doing group recitations of parts of the Qur'ān and spiritual poetry at certain occasions such as the one described.

⁂

LETTER 195

The man who laughed in the mosque

I WENT INTO a mosque of the Banī Zarwāl with my brother in God, Sīdī Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥājj al-Suwwālī (may God be merciful to him), and as we were resting there, we heard a lot of laughter and joking from some students there. This was because [at the time] I had a walking stick with strange looking curve to it, and students had gathered around [to look at it] and laugh. Then all of them quieted down except for one man who could not stop laughing and it was at that time that a jinn took possession of him.[393] This jinn would order him to make the ablution, pray the Prayer, and recite the Qur'ān, saying to him, "Unless you are this way always, you will always be afflicted." So he stayed in that state, and if he left it, the jinn would return. This went on for about a year, and then we lost track of him. *Peace.*

---

[392] What the man said appears to be mostly sarcasm meant to insult the Shaykh.

[393] The idea here is that it was bad enough to be laughing uncontrollably in a mosque, but also to be laughing at the Shaykh's walking stick showed extremely poor manners.

⁂

LETTER 196

The man who talked too much and the hand-mill

THERE WAS CERTAIN brother who talked to people excessively. I asked him to stop, but he would not. Rather, he would say, "This won't hurt me!" and this went on until one night I convinced him. Inwardly, he had come to his right mind and acknowledged that what I was saying was right, but outwardly he could not bear [being shown he was wrong]. So when I saw his mind at work [about this], I said to him, "The mill is turning, and now you are grinding the flour!"[394] And I moved my hand four times in a circular movement like someone grinding flour. Just at that moment, a hand-mill that was nearby us turned four times, just as my hand was turning, neither faster nor slower. Seeing this, the brother fully acknowledged and accepted what I had said to him.

That was by the grace of my Lord, Who replaced my weakness with His Strength, and my helplessness with His Power. Praise and thanks be to God. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 197

A request denied

A CERTAIN MAN asked me to go to relatives of mine with a request he had about something he needed from them, but they refused to help and more than that, treated me with pride and arrogance. I said to them, "If you deny the blood relationship that is between us, it could come back to you through someone's death." It was [shortly after] that time that they got burnt by [the explosion of some] gunpowder[395] which caught their clothes on fire and four days later one of them died as I had said might happen. *Peace.*

---

[394] In Morocco, to this day, there are places where women still grind flour using the traditional *raḥā'* or hand-mill, consisting of a mill stone, rounded on the top and bottom, which fits into another carved stone, sometimes set into the floor. The top stone is turned by means of a small wooden handle.

[395] Many mountain people in the region had flintlock style rifles. It is not clear from the text whether the gunpowder was being stored in their house or nearby, but accidents such as this were not uncommon.

⁂

LETTER 198

A conversation about the harvest

I MENTIONED IN a gathering that a certain person had said that he had harvested eight *madd* of barley per *zawj* in the Gharb.[396] One of the people of pretension disputed what I said in a manner that made me sound like a liar, saying "Even the people of Fes, who are the best of farmers, never get a yield like that-- not even close to it!" I remained silent, and just at that moment, one of the *shurafā'* of Fes arrived and greeted us all. We had all stopped talking about [the harvest], but by the power of the Hearer and Knower, he began to berate the one who had spoken to me so harshly, using language harder than he had ever heard before, and saying to him, essentially, "How can you, a white-bearded old man, be such a liar?" *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 199

The pretender who came to the zāwiya

ONE OF THOSE pretenders to sanctity came to Fes, and the people— scholars, disciples, and others-- were flocking to see him. Even many of our brethren from among the *fuqarā'* visited him, and started to imitate him, and finally even brought him to our zāwiya, which became as crowded as a marketplace. As for me, I had been in Banī Zarwāl, and then returned to find him in the zāwiya and in the state I have described. He had wanted to leave that night, but it did not work out for him to do so, and after the night Prayer I went off by myself to a place alone intending to get some sleep. But by God's generosity I found that my whole being was telling me that if that man were still in Fes by sunrise, he would die a death of the *jahiliyya*[397] or some major punishment would befall him. I told this to the *fuqarā'* after the dawn prayer of that day and they told me that one of them had already taken the man to Bāb al-Maḥrūq.[398] Later we came to know that he had said to someone, "If I stay in Fes until the sun rises, I am sure I will die or have my legs cut off!"[399] So they took him to the gate and he left the city as soon as it was opened. *And the Command of God shall be fulfilled* [4:47]. *Peace.*

---

[396] A *madd* is a measure of grain roughly equivalent of 160 liters. *Zawj* is a measurement of land used in the north of Morocco and equal to 10 hectares. In English measures, the yield described would be roughly 1.5 bushels per acre. Considering this was non-irrigated land, such a yield would be quite high.

The Gharb is the agricultural region of Morocco between Rabat and Fes.

⁂

LETTER 200

The best vocation

I FOUND THE noble saint, my master Aḥmad al-Ṭāhir, saying to the disciples, "Mūlay al-ᶜArabī is always saying, "*Tajrīd, tajrīd*.... But by God, Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh says in *al-Tanwīr* that to be part of the workaday world is superior to *tajrīd*." And my pious brother, Mūlay al-Tuhāmī al-Rukūnī, agreed with him, [and quoted the *ḥadīth*]: "Truly, God loves the servant who has a vocation."[400]

I listened to what they said and thought about it deeply, and then I said to them—by the generosity of God—"Yes, God loves the servant who has a vocation, but the greatest vocation is to leave all other vocations. God Most High says, *And whosoever reverences God* ... [65:2-3], and *whosoever trusts in God, He suffices him. Truly God fulfills His Command.* ...[65:3], and *Had the people of the towns believed and been reverent*...

---

[397] *Jahiliyya*, "the age of ignorance," usually refers to the pre-Islamic times in the Arabian peninsula. Here the Shaykh is using it to mean dying in disbelief and disgrace.

[398] One of the city gates in the northwest corner of Fes al-Bālī that were closed at night and opened just around the Prayer of *fajr*, about an hour and a half before dawn.

[399] Meaning, "I will never be able to leave."

[400] This is conveyed as a *ḥadīth* with the wording, "Verily God loves the believer" (or "the faithful servant," or "the young man") "who has a vocation," by Ṭabarānī, in *al-Awsaṭ* and *al-Kabīr*, Bayhaqī, in *Shuᶜab al-Īmān*, al-Muttaqī, in *Kanz al-ᶜummāl*, and other sources.

[7:97]. This put an end to their disputing and they fell silent and spoke no more. May God be pleased with them both. *Peace*

⁂

LETTER 201

News of a death

MY SOUL SPOKE to me: "There will come to you news of the death of a relative," and suddenly there was a man handing me a letter which told me exactly what my soul had said, neither more nor less. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 202

A debt to a butcher

I BOUGHT SOME meat near Bāb al-Silsilah and but I was short two *mūzūn*.[401]I said to the butcher, "Leave it to me as a debt." He said, "When will you pay me?" Answering from my own ego, I said, "Tomorrow, God willing." But then I was reminded of God's power, and as soon as I was, I said to him, "I will give it to you right now!" He handed me the meat and I had just started to walk away when a man came up to me, placed the two *mūzūn* in my hand, and quickly walked away. Thus did the mystery of [letting things] be borne by God's power show itself to me, and if I had taken the debt upon my own feeble self to bear, it would have remained for a very long time, or even—as they say—would have stayed a debt for the Next World. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 203

The squash

I NEEDED A squash for our evening meal which was complete except for a vegetable. So I went out to find one, and when I got to the Ḥarraqīn marketplace, I stretched out my hand to beg for enough to buy one. The second person I asked said, "By God, O *mūlay*, all I have to give you is this squash," and I said to him, "O *mūlay*, the only reason I came here was that squash!" Glory be to the One Who gives when there is need and withholds when there is not. *Peace.*

---

[401] A *mūzūn* was the smallest denomination coin of the Shaykh's time. These were minted with holes in the middle and were sometimes sewn onto women's clothes as decoration. The value was about a penny.

LETTER 204

Letting God defend you

I WAS WALKING from the Raṣīf market towards al-ʿUyūn when I met one of my relatives, and I saw marks on his face. I said to him, "What's the matter? Where are you going?" He answered, "So-and-so slapped me in the face—that is where these marks are from—and I am summoning him to the judge." I said, "If what you are saying is true, God will avenge you now." And he replied, "If what I am saying is not true, may God reap vengeance upon me now!"

It became clear to me that the one at fault was the one who was being summoned, so I let my relative go on his way to the judge, saying to him, "Put this whole matter in God's Hands and you will see marvels!" It came to pass that the man who had been summoned was arrested at that time, given a beating, and locked up for a while. Later he was released and wound up killing someone. The judge ordered that he be brought to him in shackles, and he was sent to a distant place and was imprisoned there for an entire year, then finally released. *And the Command of God shall be fulfilled.* [4:47]. *Peace.*

LETTER 205

Seeing al-Khiḍr

ONE DAY I said to myself, "Al-Khiḍr ﵇[402] is going to lean on that post." Then, behold, there was a man leaning against it as I had said, and he was looking in my direction with a beautiful gaze. I felt reverence and respect towards him, and such a great sense of awe came to me that I was sure it was him ﵇. Then he left and when I got up to look for him, I found no one. *Peace.*

---

[402] See footnote 138.

⁂

LETTER 206

The *fuqarā'* who were too busy

A GROUP OF the *fuqarā'* were with me when there happened to us concerning *tajrīd* what happened to the fox who says about the grapes he cannot reach, "They were sour anyway," and gives up. When they were not able to follow the way of *tajrīd*, all they could do was find fault with it, and no longer wished to be with me after having been inseparable from me. But it was by God's decree that we wound up together with some other people for a meal, and a man [who had been with me] said, "By God, dear master, if I had not been so busy, I never would have separated from you." I answered, "What?" And he repeated what he had said. I said, "By God's generosity, those words you addressed to me are the words with which our Lord addressed us all, saying, "By My Majesty and My Might, if I had not made you busy, I would not have separated from you." So the words came in their proper place, and obedience appeared out of error, for the people I have mentioned had been praising worldly involvement, which is what makes people neglect the remembrance of God, and finding fault with *tajrīd* through which we may realise the remembrance of God. There is no strength nor power but through God. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 207

The man who asked that his son leave the state of *tajrīd*

THERE WAS A certain [youth from a] noble family who had entered the state of *tajrīd* because of some teachings he received from me, but his father was so against what he had done that I feared he was going to kill me. The ᶜĪd holiday was approaching, but the father could not celebrate it as long as his son was in that state. He came to me and said, "Do something for me for God's sake: return my son to his normal clothes and his normal state, for I cannot bear to see him the way he is now," adding, "By God, if you do not, this will not be the Feast (*al-ᶜĪd*) for me; it will be a funeral." So I went with him to his house with the intention of directing his son to return to his normal state.[403] The father entered the house first [to inform his family] that I was coming in, and I sat waiting outside the door, invoking God. At that moment, a man from among his relatives also arrived at the door. This man, who I knew as someone who pretended to be a *faqīh* and a Sufi, sat right in front of me, in a posture of confrontation, and began shouting at me with extremely foul language, but I continued to invoke God and did not respond to him in the least, and this continued until the father came out and found us both this state. When he did, he had changed so completely that you could see it in his face. Before that moment, he had hated me and had opposed me repeatedly, but then when he saw what was happening to me, he changed and recognized his error, for he and the relative [who was haranguing me] were very similar to one another, both physically and in nature. He ignored his relative and said to me, "Please arise, dear sir, and let's go inside, "and he swore he would not go in unless I went in first, looking at me and not at his relative. I started to walk away from them both and the owner of the house came after me to bring me back, but I would not return, even though he was treating me with kindness and goodness. Finally, he let me go.

After that, the man who had shouted at me fell ill with a fever which lasted one month. Some of the brothers visited him during that time, and he said to them, "Please ask [the Shaykh] to come see me for the sake of God so that I might ask his pardon." It was not possible, however, for me to go at that time. They visited him another time, and he said to them what he had said before, but I was not able to go. They visited him a third time, and he asked the same thing, but I was still not able to go. Then he passed away, may God have mercy him, and I pardoned him for the sake of God and His Messenger ﷺ and attended his funeral, may God have mercy upon me and him and all Muslims. *Peace.*

---

[403] It is worth noting that in this case the Shaykh did not wish to create discord in a family.

⁂

LETTER 208

The *sharīf* who harangued him for begging

I WAS IN Fes during a time of famine, going from shop to shop begging for food. It was a time of extreme poverty, rain, cold, mud, hunger, and darkness, and my family was waiting like birds for me to bring them something to eat.[404] Then there appeared a *sharīf*, looking himself very well-fed, who began insulting me because he did not like my begging, and followed me from shop to shop wherever I went until it started getting dark, the approach of night separated us, and I went home. That same night, however, before the last light had vanished from the sky, a person came to me from the father of the *sharīf*, saying "He begs your pardon and asks that you come with the *fuqarā'* and be present for the funeral of his son, may God have mercy on his soul." *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 209

The man who struck his relative

I WAS HOLDING on to my beard and laughing [in the midst of a conversation] with a relative of mine and said to him, "Now you'll get what's coming to you!" Suddenly a man came in whom I knew to have a bad character (may God keep his like few amongst us) and struck my relative with a walking stick so hard near his ear that he fell to the ground unconscious. All this happened so fast that I was still holding on to my beard and seeing with my eyes what God caused to happen, *And the Command of God shall be fulfilled* [4:47]. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 210

An incident in the marketplace

I WALKED UP to the Thursday market at Bāb al-Maḥrūq in Fes and with me was the imminent *faqīh*, Sīdī Muḥammad ibn ᶜAlī al-Lajjā'ī,[b] one of my teachers of Qur'ān who loved me greatly. Since he was a bachelor, he had no need of anything inside the marketplace and so he just sat on the edge of it, while I went in to buy some meat, for I was married. I said to one of the butchers who was a friend of Sultan Sīdī Muḥammad ibn ᶜAbdallāh,[b] "For how much will you sell this [meat] to me?" He answered, "Make an offer!" I said, "I will give you three coins for it."[405] Hearing this, the butcher stood up and began shouting insults at me (may God grant us peace!) but I remained silent and did not respond. At that very instant, one of the other butchers stabbed him with a long knife so deeply it went completely through his thigh. All this happened while my teacher, the *faqīh,* looked on from where he was seated nearby, so he saw the man stand up raging at me, saw that I did nothing, and was watching to see whether I tried to defend myself from the butcher's insults or not, for I had previously told him what my master, SīdīᶜAlī, taught me about not defending myself. Eventually the wounded butcher was carried away on a stretcher (*naᶜsh*)[406] to Fes al-Jadīd. I never learned what God did with him—whether He caused him to die or allowed him live. This was the first thing that happened to me.[407] *Peace.*

---

[404] This was presumably when the Shaykh was a student at the Miṣbāḥiyya school before he met his own teacher.

⁂

LETTER 211

When rain flooded the mosque

WHEN I HAD begun the life of spiritual poverty and stripped myself of things I had previously been involved with which were approved of by many people but really nothing in themselves, my family and others started to dislike me. After I had been agreeable to them, I became disagreeable for them.

During this time there occurred a drought that went on and on and my family had a gathering where my brother ᶜAlī (may God have mercy upon him) said to me, "God's saints have miracles, and here we are with our grain dying for lack of water. If you are one of those saints, then pray to God to bring us rain, or else cast aside this life of poverty and just concentrate on your studies." I was quiet and did not answer him at all, but he kept talking to me and even started to insult and attack me. Those who were present actually approved of what he was saying to me, for in their eyes I was someone who had lost his way, lost his vision, and disgraced the family. What was happening between us went on and on, but I was patient with them—and no one could have been that patient unless God had taken him by the hand or else was helpless to do otherwise—until my heart was broken. I walked out of the mosque where they had gathered (may God be pleased with them) and lifted my eyes heavenward. The sky was clear except for one small cloud directly above, and I said—as one of the saints had said—"By God, dear Lord, if You do not have mercy upon me, I will be angry." The little cloud that had been above us (blessed be God!) was spread out by the wind to the left and to the right, and forward and back, and rain began to fall so hard it soaked us, outside the mosque and inside, for the water even started flooding the mosque as it was flooding [the ground] outside. So there we were with water above us and water below us by the grace of my Lord Who covered my helplessness with His power. *Peace.*

---

[405] Literally, "three faces (*thalāthata awjah*)", referring to the image stamped on the coins, which at that time was a six-pointed star. From the context, we can conclude this was very little money.

[406] A wooden stretcher normally used to bear a dead person to be washed and then to be buried. These are usually found in a storage area of a mosque.

[407] Meaning the first of these strange incidents that the Shaykh is recounting.

⁂

LETTER 212

Another Prayer for rain

AFTER THE PRAYER, when we had supplicated God for rain but He had not sent us any, I said to myself, "What we are asking for is something important, but this should not be difficult for the people of God. Indeed, it should be easy for them." Then I reflected upon the state of our brothers, the *fuqarā'*, and found that many of them were inclining towards the world, and I knew that the true secret manifests itself in the sensory world,[408] and that it may have already done so. So I wrote to the Shaykh to ask [if I might] return them from the world to the Way, but at that moment my soul said to me that rain was going to fall, so I called the messenger back from the road, and at the same instant, rain began falling and God's blessings were spread far and wide. Praise and thanks be to God, Lord of the worlds. *Peace.*

---

[408] That is, whatever is happening in the physical world is a reflection of something happening in the spiritual world and vice versa.

⁂

LETTER 213

A letter to the Sultan that did not get sent

WHEN THE CAID al-Jaᶜīdī[b] began to oppress the people of Fes, a group of them came to me to complain. I felt pity for them and resolved to write a letter to the Sultan, Sīdī Muḥammad ibn ᶜAbdallāh[b] (may God have mercy on his soul) in Marrakesh to inform him of the situation. So I composed a letter and I intended to send it with anyone who might be travelling there, but at that moment my soul spoke to me saying, "All that you wish to say to him has already been engraved upon his heart and you will see that with your own eyes, God willing." At that moment, there arrived a message from the Sultan to the people of Fes which was read from the pulpit of the Qarawiyyin Mosque and I was there among the generality and the elect who heard it. Part of what it said was, "My heart is like the milk [of compassion] towards you, and this is not for any particular reason, but rather through something heavenly from God." Such were his words, and God is a warrant for what I say. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 214

A wild boar

ONE DAY I was sitting in a remote woods, with no people around. I had been invoking the Supreme Name of God, *Allāh,* for some time and had found in my soul—O you saints of God—marvels, when suddenly a large wild boar stood up nearby me from where it had been sleeping and ran off. That was by the grace of my Lord who had diminished my human nature and strengthened my spiritual nature, until I saw what I did not know without intercessor.[409] *And God is Possessed of Tremendous Bounty* [2:105; 3:74; 8:29; 57:21, 29; 62:4]. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 215

A prayer for rain and for the Sultan

THERE WAS A winter during the time of the great sultan, the noble and generous Sīdī Muḥammad ibn ᶜAbdallāh ibn Ismāᶜīl al-ᶜAlawī,[b] when no rain had fallen for a long time. We had asked God to send us rain, but none came, and people had given up hope that there would be any that year.[410]

Some of our brethren from the Banī Aḥmad had sacrificed [a sheep] at the tomb of Sīdī Aḥmad ibn Yūsuf (may God benefit us by his blessing), as was their custom,[411] and when we had eaten, we removed our head cloths and sandals and walked around the shrine three times in that state saying,

> Our Lord Your good pleasure we seek,
> We are standing at Your door.
> No one else but You can show us mercy,
> O Most Merciful of those who have mercy.

Then we raised our hands in supplication, each one of us separately, to supplicate our Lord, silently and aloud, weeping and humbled, expressing to Him our dire need. At that moment, my soul said to me, "Your prayers will not be answered until you ask God's help for the Sultan with your hearts and limbs, in your loudest voices, three times." That was a time when no one was doing this; in fact, they were not speaking of him at all except to say he was dead. They did not know that he was alive in Marrakesh. So I told the people what my soul had said to me and all of them, and I as well, said, "May God help Sīdī

---

[409] Wild boar still roam the mountainous regions of Morocco and are considered dangerous.

[410] We can surmise from this that the people had already offered the Prayer for rain (*ṣalāt al-istisqā*) as prescribed in the *sunna*.

[411] It was common in Morocco in times of drought and famine to make extra efforts to feed the poor.

Muḥammad ibn ᶜAbdallāh," three times. That very night our Lord had mercy upon us, sending us rain, so that goodness came to us and evil departed. Then the news spread to all the people that the Sultan himself was alive and was travelling towards Meknes (may God keep it safe from harm) and soon he was there, may God be merciful to us and to him until the Day of Judgment. O God, bless his descendants and the descendants of his grandfather ﷺ until the passing away of this world. *Peace.*

LETTER 216

The man who sought a cure for his wife.

ONE DAY WE were in Fes, when a man came to me and said, "By God, there is no one of whom I have a higher opinion than you among all the people of goodness, and I complain only to God and then to you!" I asked him what was wrong, and he said, "My wife has been sick with swelling and bleeding from her nose for two years, and I am worn out looking for a cure for her everywhere—visiting saints, having amulets written, and using medicine." I asked him where he lived, and he said near the tomb of Mūlay Idrīs,[b] so I said to him, "Take her to visit that shrine for three days, and every day you go there, give as much bread as you can in charity to the poor who are around there. Either she will be relieved of this affliction or she will pass away." He said to me, "Give me a time when this will come to pass?" I said, "How can I do that? It is God who has brought this trial upon you and God who will remove it. The servant has no power over anything!" But he implored me to give him a time, so I said to him, relying totally on God, "Between me and you, this will happen in eight days.."

Then he did what I had told him, and during those eight days, whenever he saw me, he would say that she still had the swelling and bleeding, until we reached the last of the eight days, and he said to me in the evening of the day before it, "Here we are with just one short day left." I said, "And in this day God will answer my prayer." Then each of us went to attend to his needs. We passed the night in God's mercy, and when the day arose, I went to his shop where I had always bought flour and found it locked. I asked after him from a man who ran the shop next to his, and he told me, "He has the funeral of his wife to attend to and will not be opening today." May God be a warrant for what I say and may the mercy of God (be He glorified!) be upon us and upon that woman until the Day of Judgment. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 217

The afflicted man from the Banī Akhmās

A CERTAIN MAN from the Ahkmās tribe (may God keep it safe from all harm) complained to me about a sick person in his family who had been suffering for about two years and had lost the use of one his limbs. I said to him, "Visit the saint whose shrine is near you for two Fridays and on the third, visit him, sacrifice a chicken or a sheep, and make a huge platter of food to offer to the people there. The person who is afflicted will be relieved of his illness or will pass away, God willing." He did what I advised—neither more nor less—and the afflicted man passed away (may God have mercy upon him) the night of the last day of their visits. And God is a warrant for what I say. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 218

The woman who was brought to the shrine of Sīdī Aḥmad ibn Yūsuf

I WAS INVOKING God in the last part of the night at the tomb of the saint, Sīdī Aḥmad ibn Yūsuf (may God benefit us through him) when I heard a voice calling out in desperate need. I reached out my hand toward the voice to bring the caller to me. I did not know whether it was a woman or a man, only the direction of the voice, nor could I make out a form, and when I could not see a form, I thought I must be imagining the whole thing, and began rebuking myself [for such fancy]. But when the first light of dawn shone (into the shrine), I found before me a woman from a place I knew: from the region of the saintly scholar, Sīdī al-Ḥājj ibn Muḥammad al-Zarwālī (may God benefit us through him). I said to her, "How is it you are here?" She answered, "It was like I was suspended in the air and I did not know what was happening to me until I found myself before you." But I knew what had happened to her almost eleven years before, for her husband had been one of my Qur'ān teachers with whom I had completed two recitations [following] Ibn Kathīr[412] and had also studied the Warsh recitation. God is our sufficiency and the best one in whom to put our trust, and there is no strength nor power but through God, the Sublime and All-mighty.[413] *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 219

A vision while making the ablution

ONE DAY I was performing the greater ablution near our house which is close to the tomb of the saint Aḥmad ibn Yūsuf (may God benefit us through him) in Rubᶜ Būmᶜān in the Banī Zarwāl region. This was at the beginning of the year 1209 AH.[414] Suddenly I found myself on an enormous mountain surrounded by a vast expanse of land which I did not recognize, all of it green, without a man-made structure in sight. Indeed, it seemed unimaginably remote from any settlements. I was there in the same situation I had been in near my house, performing the greater ablution, neither more nor less, and I was astonished by my situation: being in two places, one far from the other, doing the same thing at the same time.

My habit is to take a long time to perform both the lesser and greater ablution, and as I did so I remained in my bewilderment and began thinking deeply about my situation. Was it as I was finding it, or was it a dream or a hallucination? What seemed true to me was that I was in Banī Zarwāl and on Mount Qāf[415] at the same time. This state persisted for me until I had finished washing and then it left me. The mountain disappeared and I was in Banī Zarwāl. God is a warrant for what I say. *Peace.*

---

[412] That it, the reciter (*al-qāri'*) ᶜAbdallāh ibn Kathīr al-Qurayshī (d. 120/737), not to be confused with the Qur'anic exegete (*al-mufassir*), Ismaᶜīl Ibn Kathīr (d. 780/1373) after whom the well-know commentary is named.

[413] It appears from this account that the woman had been suffering from some illness—either physical or psychic—for a long time and that she was brought from a considerable distance away by *ṭayy* (literally "folding up," the miraculous spiritual travel attributed to some of the saints), to receive the blessing of the Shaykh which cured her.

[414] 1794 CE.

⁂

LETTER 220

The lost mule

ONE DAY I was with some brothers near Wad Taṣraft in the boiling midday heat when there appeared a man coming in our direction on the road who was laughing but obviously in a state of complete frustration. Before he reached us, I said to him, “So, she has wandered off?” and when he got to me he said, “Yes, exactly! May God Most High replace for me my young mule. But please tell me what has happened to her.” I said to him, “Calm down and go home. She will come back to you soon, God willing, from wherever she is.” Eight days after this, the mule returned to the man. It had not been stolen but rather had wandered off, nearly half a day’s journey from the man’s house. And may God be warrant for what I say. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 221

The lost cow

THIS IS THE greatest of God’s miraculous gifts to me or to anyone: that whenever I was in dire need of something and then turned away from it and towards my Lord—with my heart and limbs, or with my heart alone, or with my limbs alone—I would find what I had needed there before me, by the power of the Hearer and the Knower. This is how it is for me in most of my states, and God is the One Who knows best my words and deeds.

Listen, O you faithful ones, to what happened to me with a certain brother when he had found a cow wandering in from outside our area and grazing on his land. He wanted some of the brothers to help him follow it, for it would graze during the day but not return at night even though it had a calf. That night he had become very agitated and angry and wanted to confront it on the way back to its land. So I said to those brothers who were walking, “Sit down.” Then I said, “Invoke blessings upon God’s Messenger ﷺ and his family three times, then say, “*God suffices us, an excellent Guardian is He!*” [3:173] three times, and then ‘There is no strength nor power but through God the Sublime and All-Mighty’ three times.” This they did, and then I said to them, “Now go to the stream that runs through [a certain person’s land] and you will find the cow coming there, God willing.” The stream I meant was near our house. They went to it and found the cow there walking towards them. And God is a warrant for what I say. *Peace.*

---

[415] Jabal Qāf is referred to in certain Qur’anic commentaries on 50:1, which begins *Qāf. By the glorious Qur’ān*. It is described in certain *ḥadīth* and sayings as a mountain which surrounds the world.

LETTER 222

A vision of Sīdī al-Shuṭaybī

I WAS IN a state of extreme contraction and I visited the tomb of Sīdī al-Ḥājj al-Shuṭaybī al-Zarwālī[b] hoping to find a way out of that state when there before me was the saint and he said to me: “*Recite what is easy for you from the Qur’ān.*”[416] I saw him in the waking state, not in a dream, and it was among the most powerful (visions I have ever had). In this way did he bring me the remedy (may God be pleased with him and benefit us through his blessing). *Peace*

LETTER 223

A green dove

I VISITED THE tomb of the Sīdī Abū ᶜAlī in the Yūsiyya tribe hoping to receive through him some mystery. As I was sitting there, a dove that had the same green color as the cloth that covered the tomb came towards me flapping its wings, until its right wing touched my left cheek and its left wing touched my right cheek, and then it kissed my face. And God is a warrant for what we say. *Peace.*

---

[416] This is identical to the Qur’anic verse 73:20 except for the verb.

⁂

LETTER 224

The Pole

ONE DAY I was walking in the marketplace of Raṣīf in Fes in a state of extreme intoxication and extreme lucidity, both states combined within me and extremely powerful, when my soul said to me, "You are the Pole," without any inward disputer arguing about it at all. At that moment, a man was approaching me, walking quickly, until he came up to me face to face and said very clearly: "The Pole." Then he went on his way and I went on mine, and I did not turn to look back at him, for God had sufficed me. But his image has remained in my mind as clearly as if he were before me now: of medium height, beautiful face, very black hair, and it is as if I were looking at him now. He did not say, "You are the Pole;" only, "The Pole." And God is a warrant for what I say. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 225

The stork and the prayer cap

I WAS IN a state of extreme intoxication and extreme lucidity, both states combined within me and both extremely powerful. That night I went into the shrine of the Ḥasanī *sharīf* and saint, Mūlay Aḥmad al-Ṣaqallī[b] in Fes. It was the time for the sunset prayer and the muezzin was just making the call from the minaret. I was wearing an old patched cloak and three old prayer caps on my head, for that was my state at the time, and I said to myself, "I would like a fourth prayer cap!" Just at that moment the muezzin came running down from the minaret laughing, for a stork that had been carrying a prayer cap to her nest had let it fall on him, and he had found that funny. I said to him, "Give it to me. She was bringing it to me!" Seeing that I already had three others just like it on my head, he handed it to me.

This is how it is for people of spiritual sincerity: whatever manifests itself in their hearts will appear soon in the physical world. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 226

"Here comes sincerity!"

I HAD MADE an intention to be totally sincere towards God in His commandment and prohibition. This was a firm and binding vow and by the grace of God I was holding fast to it. One day I entered the shrine of the saint Sīdī Ḥanīn al-Fāsī—he was the seventh for the people of Fes—and found it crowded inside with people as well as with people going in and coming out. There was nothing in my heart except sincerity with God in every state and I had gotten so strong at certain times that I could burst apart. I entered the shrine as I have said into a great crowd of people and in such a strong state, that the moment he saw me, a certain *majdhūb* who was watching me approach from a corner of the shrine, began saying, "Here comes sincerity! Here comes sincerity!" two or three times. God is a warrant for what I say. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 227

When the Shaykh needed paper to continue writing

I WAS WITH the pious preacher, my brother Abū ᶜAbdallāh Sīdī Muḥammad ibn ᶜAbdallāh al-Makūdī,[b] near my house that is near the saint Sīdī Aḥmad ibn Yūsuf. The place we were sitting was not on the road to the marketplace. We were writing down some of our letters and needed paper. At that moment, one of the *fuqarā'* started walking towards us without our having asked and bringing us paper by a path that was not coming from the marketplace, but exactly at the time we stopped, neither before nor after. And God is a warrant for what I say. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 228

When he said, "Go forth" to the *faqīh*

ONE DAY I was in the Shaykh's zāwiya in the Ramīla neighborhood of Fes al-Bālī, encouraging the *fuqarā'* towards silence. I was in a state of extreme intoxication, extreme lucidity, and exceedingly powerful in both directions. With us was one of the *fuqahā'* from among our brethren of Fes who shared with us the love of our master, and was following his teachings. I said to them, "Make silence one of your most important daily practices, the one you prefer, the head of them all." Upon hearing this, the Fāsi *faqīh* began to laugh at what I said, making light of it and even mocking it. I said to him, after God had replaced my impotence with His power, "Go forth, then, without silence!" stretching out the pronunciation of the letter *sīn* in "go" (*sīr*) long enough to recite the *Fātiḥa* three times and in a single breath. By God's power and decree, this resulted at that moment in his leaving Fes in great turmoil, and from that time he went from land to land and from country to country, all the way to Istanbul. Then he returned to Fes, then from Fes back to Istanbul, and at this time he is in Egypt, and God knows better where he stopped, but everywhere he went, he would get close to the people of power and authority of that place. God made them attractive to him and everyone else repulsive, and made playing games like checkers and chess with them attractive to him, and what should have most mattered to him repulsive. [This happened] after he had been one of the greatest of scholars, and after he had had a home, a wife, children, neighbors, and friends—and there is no strength nor power but through God.

Bear witness to the fact that I have regretted what issued forth from me that day and I have turned away from ever repeating it. May God accept our forgiveness and his and anyone's who has transgressed. Amen! *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 229

Casting away the ego

FOR ME, THERE is no one more correct, and more in accord with the Book and the *sunna* than the one who casts off his ego and does not exalt it, who abases it and does not honor it. For it is the worst enemy we have, even as one of the masters of the Way said, "Your ego is your own worst enemy and the commander of your perdition." The Devil does not reach you except through your ego's desires and sin has no way to overwhelm you except through your ego's ignorance. The ego is a cave of darkness, a ground of appetites, a storehouse of ignorance, a mine of laziness. If it pretends to be sincere it lies. If you put it to the test, it disgraces you. If you set it straight, it goes crooked. If you try to lead it by its reins, it lies down. If you let it go, it gets lost. If you pardon it, it asks for safe passage. There is no remedy for it except to oppose it and to impose upon it the rigors of self-reckoning. Shaykh al-Majdhūb[b] said concerning it:

> If I am safe from you, O my ego,
> I have no foe that can harm me
> And if I sin against You, O Lord
> Where is the land that can shelter me?

Peace.

LETTER 230

Chatting when others are in worship

O FAQĪR! For you to be chatting while people are offering the Prayer, or teaching knowledge, or reading the Mighty Qur'ān, or invoking God ﷻ is very offensive and very ugly. It is a thousand times better to be far from them, or to be sleeping. So if you are not offering the Prayer with others, or learning some knowledge, or invoking your Lord with the invokers, then go away from them, go sleep with those who are sleeping, or run away with those who are running away, for that is the correct behavior, and may God curse anyone who would lie. *Peace.*

LETTER 231

Repair what you have ruined

GOD BESTOWED UPON you, O *faqīr*, a rare and precious robe, but not knowing its worth, you have torn it in to so many pieces that you can never rejoin them. If you understand my allusion and indication, then may God bless you. If not, then bring together those you have separated from the people who love you and who support you, and repair what you have ruined. Then you will see marvels. *Peace.*

LETTER 232

The true elixir

THE TRUE ELIXIR, O *faqīr*, which transforms beings, which endows a person with mastery over his ego, over men and jinn, which bears the good of this world and the Next, and which is unknowable solely by the mind, is what the Messenger of God ﷺ brought, expressed in the words of God *Whatsoever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatsoever he forbids to you, forgo* [59:7]. We could also say that it is to realize [within yourself] primordial purity, correct intention, love, cleanliness, contentment, spiritual neediness, sincerity, passion for God, longing for God, humility, a good opinion [of God and of others],[417] noble character, generosity, modesty, trustworthiness of promise, respect for what the religion prohibits, lowliness before God, patience in the face of trials, contentment with God, and respect for God's laws.

We could also say that it is to follow his Noble Companions and the trusted people of authority of the community of believers. These are many, both living and dead (may God benefit us through their blessing!), except that no one knows them except the one who has reached their station or stands in their footprints, taking them for guides, and only someone endowed with deep insight will undertand this. Others, however—as we have already said—will not.

Anyone who has been given this incomparable elixir has been given great goodness and a manifest secret, and anyone who is deprived of it, is devoid of good, mystery, blessing, excellence, and even religion. He is like an inanimate object, like an animal—and God knows best. In fact, we consider a green twig on a tree to be better than such a one, since the twig perpetually glorifies God Most High even though it bears no responsibility, whereas the empty person we have mentioned is responsible, not excused—and may God take by the hand every single one of faith, be they jinn or human.

---

[417] See footnote 133.

Drink deeply, my brother, drink deeply my brethren, from this water as we have drunk, and give praise to God as we have praised Him… Acceptance, and acceptance, and acceptance. Fairness, and fairness, and fairness. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 233

Stories of those who opposed their egos' desires

KNOW, *O FAQĪR*, that there are extraordinary benefits in opposing the ego. It is enough here to mention the story of the Christian who only did what weighed heavily on his ego, nothing that was light for it, and because of this, God gave him the amazing power to heal by only the touch of his hand any Christian who came to him with an affliction. The news of this man spread through the lands until it reached one of God's friends among the Muslims. When he heard this, he said, "This is a miracle given only to the saints and not possible for anyone who does not believe in God. This is truly a marvel. By God, I will journey to him no matter where he is and ask him concerning his deeds." So he travelled to him and asked him about his practice, and he said, "I do nothing except what is hard on my ego, nothing which is light for it."

The saint then said to him, "If you are truthful in what you claim, then present to yourself the possibility of becoming a Muslim and see if it is hard for you or easy." This he did, and found that the possibility was harder on his ego than anything previously, and he informed the saint of this, who answered, "If you are truthful, then become a Muslim." There was nothing else for him to do except embrace Islam on the spot with the saint. At that moment, may God be merciful to him, it was as if he had been like a person at the bottom of a well who was suddenly raised up to the top of a minaret by God's grace and favor. Thus does God come to be known, as well as through ways that are even greater than this and stranger.

This story is well-known to the people of knowledge after having been unknown to them. It is not to be found in Sīdī Bukhārī or Sīdī

Muslim, nor in any other of the sound *ḥadīth* collections, but its excellence is like the sun over the world, for it contains great goodness and a clear and evident mystery.

So try this, O *faqīr*, for the knowledge of essential truths is found through experience. One who tries, succeeds, while one who lies fails.

Similar to this [story] is what happened to the man who vowed to God to do nothing except what opposed his ego. He had followed this practice for some time, and then one day he found himself next to a butcher's shop and caught sight of an excellent cut of meat hanging there. He began to want that meat so much that finally he had to buy it. But immediately afterwards, because of his long practice of opposing his desires, he realized what he was doing, quickly threw the meat down, and left. At this, the butcher came running out of his stall and ran to catch up with the saint saying to him, "I turn in repentance to God, O friend of God, and will not do anything like this again as long as I live," for he believed that God had shown the saint the truth: that what he had been selling people that day was actually carrion (*al-jīfa*). The butcher had been fattening a ram, but it had died, and in his greed to make back the money he had spent on the animal, he had been selling what is forbidden for people to eat. When he saw the man throw the meat down, he became convinced that he was one of God's saints who had been was given supernatural vision (*al-kashf*) into things. But the man who had thrown down the meat after having paid for it and taken it with him was only opposing his ego's desires. So it became the means by which both of them profited: the butcher repented to his Lord and the man was strengthened in his practice when he saw the mystery it contained. But the man was not one of God's saints as the butcher had thought. He was just a person hoping to reach sanctity by struggling against his ego.

This is a curious and excellent story that supports the practice of opposing the ego, which is at the very heart of worship. Indeed, only someone for whom God wants success follows this way.

> Oppose the self and devil—and defy them,
> If they try to offer you advice, treat it with suspicion.[418]

---

[418] *The Burda*, *op. cit.*, line 24.

as Sīdī al-Buṣīrī[b] says in his treasured *Burda* and as Sīdī ibn al-Bannā'[b] says in his *Mubāḥith.*

> He who permits his ego all that it desires
> Makes his passions into his lord.

So if you see your ego, O *faqīr*, longing for the object of its appetites, then be aware of what that object it is. If it is something demonic or egoistic, then it is absolutely essential for you, if you are sincere, to abandon it in all haste. If not, then you have a choice, but there is no doubt that the people of sincerity will choose to leave it rather than take it. For there is purity in leaving it as opposed to taking it. On the other hand, the ego may have some part in giving it up, in which case it is better to take it if it is something permissible. And God knows better.

No doubt, the greater struggle is the struggle against the ego, even as it was reportedly said by the Prophet ﷺ upon returning from a battle: "We have come back from the lesser struggle (*al-jihād al-aṣghar*) to the greater struggle (*al-jihād al-akbar*)."[419]

[It has also been said concerning] its excellence that to abandon one of the ego's desires is more useful to the heart than fasting and keeping vigils for a year,[420] and one of the saintly said, "I would rather abstain from one bite of my evening meal, than to eat it and then stand all night in prayer."[421] It was also said by one of the masters of the Way that there was a prophet who spoke to God Most High and asked, "Where can I find you, O Lord?" And God answered, "Leave your ego behind and come to Me!" *Peace.*

---

419 The wording of this narrative in Bayhaqī, *Zuhd*, and other sources is "We have advanced in the best way. We have advanced from the lesser struggle to the greater struggle." They asked, "And what is the greater struggle?" He answered, "The servant's struggle against his own desires," or in another wording, "The struggle of the heart."

420 This saying is found in *Iḥyā ʿulūm al-dīn*, III:21, attributed to Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī.

421 See footnote 298.

LETTER 234

The Prayer of seeking God's choice

IF YOU WISH to subjugate illusory thoughts as they have subjugated you, then hold fast to the *sunna* of your Prophet ﷺ as long as you live and as long as you are able and if you intend to undertake something important, and you are worried about how it might turn out, then find recource in the Prayer of seeking God's choice (*al-istikhāra*) as related by the Prophet ﷺ. This consists of offering a Prayer of two bowings, reciting in each the *Fātiḥa*, followed by (a short sūra) such as *al-Kāfirūn* in the first and *al-Ikhlāṣ* in the second, reciting the *basmala* at the beginning of the *Fātiḥa* of each sūra, and "*Āmīn*" after the words "*Nor of those who are lost* (*wa la-ḍ-ḍāllīn*)" and then supplicating God in each prostration with this prayer:

> "O God, I truly seek what You choose (for me) in Your knowledge, and what You determine (for me) in Your power, and I ask You for Your grace, the greatest of (all that is) great. For You are the One Who is able, and I am unable, and You are the One Who knows, and I do not know, and You are the Knower of the unseen.
>
> O God, if in Your knowledge, You know that this matter is good for me in my religion, my worldly life, and my living, in my appointed destiny and the outcome of my concern, in the long run and in the short run, then put it within my reach and make it easy for me, and bless me therein.
>
> And if in Your knowledge, You know that this matter is bad for me in my religion, my worldly life, and my living, in my appointed destiny and the outcome of my concern, in the long run and in the short run, then keep it away from me and me away from it, and decree for me what is good, whatever it may be, then make me content with it. Verily You, over all things, have power."

When you complete these two bowings and have uttered the closing salutation, repeat this Prayer of two bowings we have described seven times, from beginning to end, and God Most High will show you what is true and what is false. Know, too, from the time of my youth until now—and that is a period of more than fifty years—I have not approached any matter of import without offering the *istikhāra* taught by the Prophet ﷺ, and in all that time I have seen nothing but good result from it—and may God be a warrant for what I say. I also believe that to repeat the *istikhāra* is appropriate for someone at the station of heedlessness. For every station there is an invocation.

Also, there is no doubt that this teaching we are passing on is for the generality of the *fuqarā'*, not for the elect among them. The elect among them who do what I have reminded them to do will not ignore it. Also: it is indispensible to know the rules of the religion and not to neglect them, to be strict in keeping them and not to disregard them, and to always recognise the sanctity of the one who brought them to us, our Prophet ﷺ, as well as the sanctity of those who received them and passed them down to us, without change or alteration. Beware—again, beware—of disregarding their sanctity and the sanctity of the one who brought them to us, whenever it arises, lest you be diminished in the sight of the Most Merciful—and we seek refuge from being diminished in God's sight. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 235

The blessed man who wrote down his answers

IT WAS AROUND the time the Muslims re-took al-Burayja [422]—the ruler then was the great and noble sultan Abū ᶜAbdallāh Sīdī Muḥammad ibn ᶜAbdallāh al-ᶜAlawī—[b] that I spent the night at the house of a man from the tribe of the Ashrāfa who inhabit the region near Sīdī Abū al-Shitā' al-Khammār[b] and I found with him a man of blessing and goodness who was extremely aged, perhaps over a hundred and ten years old. This man was named al-Ḥājj Mubārak Barghūt al-Salāsī, may God strengthen us with others like him by the honor of the Prophet ﷺ, and he had been among the first to know the great master, Mūlay al-Tuhāmī ibn Muḥammad al-ᶜAlamī al-Wazzānī ؓ. Both of us were given the same room of the house to sleep in that night, but while the owner of the house had set up a nice raised bed with a mattress and a lamp nearby for that blessed man, I was given a place on the ground without any padding. I made the ablution and offered the obligatory prayer, then I took my rosary and began invoking God for a while. During the whole time, however, that blessed man was turned towards me in rapt attention and interested in what I was doing even though I did not turn in his direction. His interest got so strong that he began talking to me, but I spoke very little with him in return, and he began asking me questions, which I answered as well as I could, trying to give him concise and useful answers. Then there occurred to me one answer that would suffice him: I said, "If the teachers of this age were to follow my advice, they would have it proclaimed in the marketplaces: '*Lā ilāha illā Llāh, Lā ilāha illā Llāh, Lā ilāha illā Llāh, Sayyidunā Muḥammadun Rasūlu Llāh* ﷺ. Listen, O servants of God, and you will hear only good! We are innocent of all of you who have taken from us the litany and who have taken us as masters, for we are unable to free ourselves from passions let alone free others."

---

[422] See footnote 178.

Then that blessed man quickly arose from his place and said, "By God! No one will sit in this place of mine except you!" Then he sat down where I was sitting on the ground and I did what he told me to calm him and then I took him back to his place on the bed, but only after he had made me lie down in his place and asked my pardon many times. Then he called for the owner of the house, someone who loved me greatly even as I loved him greatly, who would visit me even as I would visit him, and honor me even as I honored him, and respect me even as I respected him, for he had a nephew who was like a son to him, and even though he was a man of means, he had no children, and that nephew had studied with my brother the Warsh[b] and Q̱ālūn recitations, and had studied Ibn Kathīr[423] as it should be, and as was pleasing to him, his family, and his friends, and he had studied the Baṣrī recitation with me. [So his love for me was great] but not as great as it was for that blessed man. When he came, the latter said to him, "You need to get on your horse, go to the nearest druggist's,"—and it was evening at the time—"and bring me some paper."

---

[423] See footnote 412.

The host went quickly and came back with paper and from that time until we slept that blessed man wrote down everything he heard from me, for he knew what I said to him was true, not false.

The masters of the Way ؓ are almost prophets or the children of prophets (God's blessings and salutations of peace be upon them) and yet the ignorance of the day and of other times judged them according to people's own opinions, making the generality into the elect and the elect into the generality—and whoever lies, lies against himself. If only Sīdī Ḥājj Mīmūn al-Maʿaskarī could hear this and look into himself and ask where he is in this respect and act fairly concerning it... for the truth has a right to be followed. *Peace*

LETTER 236

The incident of the oxen

A BEDOUIN MAN residing in Fes confronted us concerning two oxen we had bought[424] with the intention of visiting Shaykh Sīdī ʿAlī Abū'l-Ḥasan ؓ. One of the two we had bought from the Arab ox sellers who were in Zaytūna al-Maṭrūḥ in the region of [Banī] Wariyāghil (may God shield it from tribulation) and the other from some people from a tribe that had tried to sell it in Fes al-Bālī but had not found a buyer. They had been taking the ox back with them when we encountered them in Ajannata Lamṭa and after they explained to us the situation with the ox, we bought it from them.

Even after explaining this to the Bedouin man who was confronting us aggressively, he could not accept it. Instead, he continued to bicker with us concerning the oxen for about three days, until we became extremely annoyed with him. Everyone in our group [of *fuqarā'*] as well Shaykh Sīdī ʿAlī were perplexed by our situation. Then, after those three days, God be He blessed and exalted, inspired me by His grace and favor to say to the man who was arguing with us, "For the sake of God, listen to what I have to say." The man said, "Speak!" and I said to him, "Go perform the ablution and offer a Prayer of two bowings.

---

[424] That is, he claimed that the oxen were his. Oxen are still used extensively by the Jabāla people for plowing .

Then invoke blessings upon the Messenger of God ﷺ ten times, and then return to me, and God willing there will be goodness between you and me." He went and did as I had asked him, then came back to me and said, "I have returned from doubt to certainty. Those are not my two oxen."

O my brothers, this is the mystery of returning to God in all things—both the great and the small. It is the mystery of being with God. From it I have come to know what I have said to you and what I continue to say to you: that every single human being is in need of many things, but in reality all of them are in need of one thing: to turn towards God and to turn away from everything that is not God. From this the great shaykh, Sīdī al-Tustarī[b], knew what to answer his disciple who said to him, "O master, we need food!" and he said, "God!" Then the disciple fell silent for a moment, and then said, "O master, we absolutely need food!" And Shaykh al-Tustarī said, "We absolutely need God." O my brothers, any one of you who knows this and is not ignorant of it must absolutely take his leave of me,[425] but if not, then he it should hold firmly to my hand and not leave me until he dies or I do. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 237

The greatest affliction

O MY BROTHER, know that I heard my exalted master, Abū'l-Ḥasan Sīdī ᶜAlī al-Jamal ؓ, say, "People say there is no affliction equal to the passing away of the Prophet ﷺ, and after that, the loss of Andalusia, for it was a land of knowledge." And I say, O Mūlay al-Tuhāmī ibn Mūlay al-Ṭayyib of the land of Sulaymāniya in Qaṣba Sharāgha, that the greatest affliction of them all is that a person should waste his life in doing what his Lord has not enjoined upon him. So look carefully, O Sīdī, at what you are involved in, from its start to its end, and if it is what concerns you and brings you goodness in the two abodes, then give praise and thanks to God Most High, and if not, then observe what he has enjoined upon and hold fast to the *sunna* of the Messenger of God ﷺ. May God curse the one who lies. *Peace.*

---

[425] Because his or her spiritual training is complete.

LETTER 238

Passing through a threshold

A person once said to me, "There is a threshold before me that is hard to cross." I said, "If you invoke blessings upon the Messenger of God ﷺ, you will cross ninety thresholds without even noticing, by God, and you will pass over the Bridge (*al-ṣirāṭ*) in the wink of an eye without even noticing it." But he did not hear me and went right on talking about the threshold and would not be silent, at which I said, "O brother, forget yourself for the sake of your Lord and you will see marvels, but do not forget your Lord for the sake of yourself, for then you will die of cares and woes, die in forgetfulness of your Lord, and we seek refuge in God, be He glorified, from that. *Peace.*

LETTER 239

The source of joy

I said to one of the brothers, "The source of joy and goodness itself is to turn always to God and be with Him, just as the source of cares, woes, and turbidity as such, and loss, is to be heedless of God and to turn away from Him—and we seek refuge in God from that! If a person awakens and turns towards his Lord and away from his desires, there will come to him the divine gifts that come to God's saints. It is essential that you take heed of what I am saying and put it into practice, and may God grant you and us His accord. *Peace.*

LETTER 240

The remedy for confusion

I also said to one of the brothers, "If you get into a state of confusion, of narrowness and difficulty, stop pondering about yourself and instead invoke blessings upon your Prophet ﷺ as much as you can, and recite whatever you can from the Qur'ān, and invoke as much as you can the formula *lā ilāha illā Llāh*. Then offer a Prayer of two bowings.

Have recourse to this whenever this state afflicts you and you will see marvels." *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 241

Being lowly like water

KNOW, O SĪDĪ, that God has exalted the water which always flows downward in humility before Him, and from it He has made all living things, even as He says, *And We have made every living thing from water* [21:30]; and *He it is Who created a human being from water, and made of him lineages and [kinships through] marriages* [25:54]; and *Have you not considered that God sends down water from the sky, wherewith We bring forth fruits of diverse colors? And in the mountains are streaks of white and red, of diverse hues, and others pitch-black. And of mankind, beasts, and cattle there are, likewise, those of diverse colors* [35:27-28]; *Have you not considered that God sends down water from the sky, conducts it as springs in the earth, then brings forth crops of diverse colors? Then they wither and you see them yellowing. Then He turns them to chaff.* [39:21] and *He sends down water from the sky, so that the riverbeds flow according to their measure and the torrent carries a swelling froth* [13:17]; and *God created every beast from water* [24:45].

So be lowly, dear brother, not exalted. Anyone who humbles himself for God, God raises up. To gain mastery over the ego is the work of the learned and faithful, so be involved with it always and you will see marvels. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 242

A definition of Sufism

I SAID TO a certain brother: "Sufism as we see it is (and God knows best!) is to observe the rules of the religion, to surrender our will to the Lord of the Worlds, and to deal with others virtuously. And as for the rejection of this world, that is something clear, because love of the world is the source of every error and tribulation, even as the Messenger of God ﷺ said.[426] So be familiar, dear brothers, with the rules of the religion which the Messenger of the Lord of the Worlds ﷺ brought to us and do not be ignorant of them; observe them carefully and do not be careless concerning them. They are the true elixir that can transform beings, and by which a person may gain mastery over his ego, jinn, humans, and all of the existence, and which brings the goodness of this world and the Next. Give up, as well, your will to your Lord in what is decreed for you and choose only what God chooses for you. To give up your will for God is an aspect of the greater sanctity (*al-walāyat al-kubrā*), and there is nothing higher than the greater sanctity except the degree of prophethood: "The end of sanctity is the beginning of the Prophet ﷺ," and God knows better.

---

[426] "Love of this world is the source of all error" is reported as a *ḥadīth* in Bayhaqī,

Listen to the words of those who give up their will to their Lord—who do not choose except what is chosen for them, and does not love except what God loves for them. When it was said to Imam ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ﵁,[b] [for example], "What is it you desire?" he answered, "What God has decreed." And Sīdī Abū Jaʿfar al-Ḥaddād, the master al-Junayd ﵁[b], said, "For forty years I have desired to desire to give up what I desire, and I have not found what I desire." One day Abū Jīda al-Fāsī of the Banī Masāfir ﵁ was near the gate of a certain man's garden when it was said to him, "Pray to God that He sends us rain!" He immediately knocked on the gate of the garden and the caretaker called out, "Who is it?" Abū Jīda said, "I want to water the garden!" The caretaker replied, "What are you thinking, you busybody! This garden belongs to its owner, not to you, and its owner knows best how to care for it." Abū Jīda then said to those he was with, "Listen to what he is saying to you."

And it was said to one of the more recent saints of our land, the Banī Zarwāl, named Sīdī Ibrāhīm al-Jintī, "Pray with us for rain." He answered, "We are God's slaves and we remain God's slaves, and He does with us what He wants." Another of them said, "For forty years God has never put me in any situation which I disliked, nor has He ever removed me from one situation to another with which I was angered."[427]

Shuʿab al-Īmān, Ibn Abī al-Dunya, *K. al-Zuhd,* Tabrīzī, *Miskat al-Maṣābiḥ*, and other sources.

[427] See footnote 253.

I know of other examples as well, but whatever we know, it is only very little, even as the Qur'ān says addressing the Noble Prophet ﷺ, *And you have not been given knowledge, save a little* [17:85]. O God, make of us and of those who love us among the people of God by the honor of our protector, the Messenger of God ﷺ.

We urge all those who love us, whether we have written to them directly or not, to learn this word by word until it is fixed before their eyes. We do not fear for anyone to whom God has granted two qualities. One is that he be always attentive, always mindful, that he not be without goodness and courage. The second is that whenever he becomes negligent of the remembrance of God, he returns to it, or whenever he sins, he turns in repentance to God at that time. For, as the Messenger of God ﷺ said, "The one who repents from sin is like one who has no sins."[428] I would also urge you to be careful that you have rid yourselves completely of urine [before washing], to be cleanly and to maintain the ablution. We have informed you of these things many times, but I do not know if you take notice or if our words are like a wind that comes [in the door] and goes [out the window]. I counsel you toward noble character, for that is religion for the people of religion, and may God curse the liar. And I counsel you also to beware of means which can lead you to fall in the sight of God (and we seek refuge from that). The sign of someone in this state is that his heart has become void of veneration for the rules of God's religion, or we could just as well say for the sanctity of the religion. May God take you and all the Muslims by the hand. Amen. *Peace.*

LETTER 243

Advice for a woman who is afflicted by whisperings

AMONG THOSE WHO loved me for the sake of God was a woman (may God multiply her like!) who had been plagued by whisperings for several years. These would come to her with such severity and afflict her with such cares and woes that that were times when she could hardly speak. I had spoken to her and warned her against paying attention to everything her soul said to her over this entire period, but then her son wrote me concerning her and I wrote back to him saying:

---

[428] See footnote 125.

"There is only goodness in your mother, nothing bad. Her only problem is in paying attention to all the imaginings that come to her, for imaginings in themselves are devoid of substance. I have pointed this out to her, reminded her, and warned her concerning them as much as I can, and part of what I have told her is that I myself had been in that same state: my imagination would show me some impossible image. It would say to me, 'Look at the sky. There are fiery arrows coming down towards you to burn you from head to foot!' And I would look and see what it was saying falling upon me. This happened to me many times until my breast had reached the limit of constriction and I was in such a state of sadness and worry that I took myself one day to a deserted spot with the intention of killing myself. And God is a warrant for what I say. After that, I said to myself, 'Nothing else will work for me except to surrender my will concerning my soul to my Lord and let Him do with it whatever He wants, either to make it happy and blessed or miserable and damned. I avoided isolation as much as I could, fled from it as much as I could, mixed with people and did not cut myself off from them, and I spoke with them and was not silent. This continued for a period of time until—by the grace of God—I completely forgot those whisperings, and all my troubles, all those impossible images that my imagination was showing me, departed completely, without leaving so much as a trace. In respect to worship, I offered only what was obligatory and the confirmed *sunna*, and there appeared to me a mighty grace and evident mystery. The means for this happening, however, was that I gave up my will to my Lord to do with my soul what He wished: either to make it among the happy and blessed or among the miserable and damned, to show it mercy or chastisement, to bring it near or keep it distant, to put it in Heaven or Hell. Then did I find rest and relief from what had afflicted me and found extreme joy, may praise and thanks be to God."

No doubt these whisperings increase for people in times of [...][429] and isolation, but if our lady Amina is as I used to be, they are going to go away, and may God curse anyone who would lie to her. Also, there is no doubt that such whisperings plague only the best of people. Listen to what befell Shaykh al-Shādhilī.[b] He said, "One night I recited *Say, "I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind, the King of mankind, the God of mankind, from the evil of the stealthy whisperer, who whispers into the breasts of mankind, from jinn and mankind*" [114], and it was said to me, "The evil of the whisperer is the whispering that comes between you and your Beloved and makes you forget His goodness and kindness towards you and reminds you of your sins, who makes your good deeds look paltry and your bad deeds look many, and takes you from having a good opinion of God and His Messenger to having a bad opinion of God and His Messenger.[430] Beware of going through that door, for it has seized many devotees and ascetics from among the people of effort and striving." This is quoted from Shaykh Ibn ᶜAbbād's commentary on the words of the *Ḥikam* of Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh [181], "He who holds forth from the standpoint of his own virtuous behavior will be silenced by misbehavior; but he who holds forth from the standpoint of God's virtuous behavior toward him will not be silenced when he misbehaves." When the great shaykh Sīdī Aḥmad ibn Abī al-Ḥawārī complained to Shaykh Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī ﵁[b] of whisperings, the latter said to him, "If you wish to be rid of them, then whenever you sense them coming, be happy for them, and they will leave you alone. Nothing angers the Devil more that the happiness of a believer, but if you let them sadden you, they will increase."[431] This is why one of the imams of the past said that whisperings only afflict those whose faith is complete: a thief does not try to rob a house that has fallen to ruins. *Peace.*

---

[429] The word in the editions we have seems to be *ṣiḥḥatihi*, "his health" but this word does not seem to fit the context.

LETTER 244

Advice on receiving guests

GIVE LIFE TO the path that God might give you life, and follow it with knowledge that God might shorten for you its distance. I counsel you to make the day when people of the Way come to visit you a day of celebration, a day of feasting, a blessed and joyful day, for it says in a noble *ḥadīth*, “To look at the face of your brother with love is better than making a retreat of forty years in my mosque.”[432] So let your only work on such a day be to offer the Prayer, recite the Qur’ān, invoke, remind one another, and anything else that brings you closer to God Most High, after you have welcomed them to the best place [to sit], whether in a zāwiya or elsewhere, and have readied for them the place where they will sleep, and have served them a meal. This should be without going to excess or burdening yourselves, as God has commanded in His words, *Let one who has abundant wealth spend from his abundance. And let one whose provision is measured spend from that which God has given him. God tasks no soul beyond that which He has given it* [65:7], and the Messenger of God ﷺ said, “Neither I nor the pious ones of my community have anything to do with *takalluf*”.[433] No one honors a guest of my Lord in whatever way he can except that God will honor him, or we could say that no one honors that guest except the one whom God has honored. And as for the one who is not honored before God, such a one God does not want to see—and we seek refuge in God from that!

---

[430] See footnotes 133 and 244.

[431] This saying is found in Ibn Mulaqqin's *Ṭabaqāt al-Awliyā'* and in *Ḥilya al-Awliyā'* as well under the entry for Abū Sulaymān al-Darānī with slightly different wordings.

If someone does not have the means to offer the guest what we have mentioned, he should at least offer him water to drink, light the lamps, clean the house, tie up any animals the guest might have and or let them out to graze, feed them, cut some fodder for them, and make sure they are safe. It is also a good thing if he can spread some sweet-smelling plants on the ground. All this is a part of love for the sake of God, of gathering for God, and drawing nearer to Him. This is the advice which God has enabled me to give concerning this, and God, be He glorified, is the One Who accords us what is right, so follow it rather than something else, and may God help you and support you. Amen. *Peace.*

---

[432] We did not find a source for this wording, but the meaning is expressed in a *ḥadīth* found in al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī’s *Nawādir al-uṣūl*, 138, “He who looks at his brother’s face with love [for God], God forgives his sins,” or in another version found in Ṭabarānī, *al-Awsaṭ*, “He who looks at his brother with love, and without malice in his heart, will not blink until he has been forgiven his prior sins.”

[433] See footnote 248.

⁂

LETTER 245

The Prayer (*al-ṣalāt*)

LET ANYONE WHO pays heed and turns away from his desires and towards his Master rejoice for the great goodness and inner secret that will come to him, for he is a friend of God ... Or we could say, let all those rejoice who pay heed and who know that the Prayer is a pillar of the religion, the first thing that God has enjoined upon His servants, and the first thing that He will ask them about on the Day of Resurrection; [who know that] this prayer is not valid without the ablution, without purity of the body, clothes, and place, and without covering one's nakedness and facing the *qibla*, and that the ablution is not valid after urination unless the servant is rid of any remaining urine. We have witnessed among the urban dwellers as well as the people of the countryside that not many people seem to realize this. Anyone who wants to witness what we have witnessed need only pay attention and it will be obvious. But dear brothers—*Take care of your own souls. The one who is in error cannot hurt you if you are guided*, even as God, be He glorified and blessed and exalted, has enjoined in His words, *O you who believe! You have charge of your own souls* ... [5:105]. And as for those who are drunk with mindlessness and stay that way, those who are unaware that they are heedless of their Lord who their religion until the angel of death comes to take their souls and they go to God unrepentant—they should know the evil which they send forward [for themselves].

We seek refuge in God and ask that God deliver us all from transgression by the honor of the Prophet, descendant of ᶜAdnān, may God shower blessings and salutations of peace in abundance upon him and his family and companions. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 246

Some of the saintly men he met and his teachers

ONCE I SAID to one of the brothers, "How many prayers did we offer, how many fasts did we keep, how many invocations of God did we make, how many invocations of blessings upon the Prophet did we invoke. We did so many practices, and yet the fruits of our practices did not reach us as it has reached others, past or present. Then we became aware of the inward sickness which is the love of this world, the heart's attachment to it and perpetual immersion in its affairs. When we gave all that up, rejected it, and turned aside from it by the grace of God, then did we attain the goodness which others have attained—and may praise and thanks be to God."

Today we would like to say something similar to those present who love us and follow us:

Let the one rejoice who is awake and alert, the one who makes an effort to arise before dawn and devote a little time to God. Anyone who can do this will not fail, for it is something heavy for the ego, and whatever is heavy for the ego is true and right. But let him above all rely upon his Lord, not upon his actions, and "the sign of depending upon one's own deeds is loss of hope when a slip occurs." even as the great shaykh Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh ؓ wrote in his *Ḥikam* [1].

As for me, I affirm that the doors to salvation and happiness are many and are not other than the rules and practices that were brought to us by the Messenger of the Lord of the worlds ﷺ. What happiness and what good news there is for the one who knows this and does not ignore it, who puts it into practice and does not neglect it.

One of these doors, from which a countless number—including ourselves—have benefitted, is to visit the friends of God. In my youth, I myself visited Abū ᶜAbdallāh Sīdī Muḥammad ibn ᶜAlī ibn Raysūn al-ᶜAlamī of Tāzrūt in the region of Jabal Aᶜlām seven times, starting from the region of Banī Zarwāl and one or two times starting from Fes. This saint was in a state of perpetual spiritual intoxication that was seldom accompanied by sobriety. One of my visits was with a group Qur'ān reciters and he gave two flat breads made with butter to me only, and to no one else. I do not know if he already had them or whether they had come to him some other way thanks to his high aspiration, for things like that are not impossible with God's saints. At any rate, I was very happy because of it as were those who loved me. Another time, I visited him in the company of some people from Fes, and he prayed to God for my well-being and was in a state of extreme spiritual intoxication (*al-jadhb*), at times reciting sūra *Yā Sīn*, at times sūra *Ṭā Hā*, at times reciting [from the] *Ḥilyā* and dancing,[434] at times weeping, at times laughing, and all of us were with him in whatever issued forth from him. Then he suddenly came in my direction seeming to be upset and struck me on my left shoulder with his right hand, and said to me, "May God strengthen you!" doing this three times. When we were about to leave, he pushed me along with his two blessed hands and then said to me, "Go! I have given you something great." This also made me very happy as well as those who loved me. I consider him my master just as I do my master of spiritual training (*al-shaykh al-murabbī*), Abū'l-Ḥasan Sīdī ᶜAlī al-Jamal ﵁.[b]

I also visited the friend of God, Mulay Mūlay al-Ṭayyib ibn Muḥammad ibn ᶜAbdallāh ibn Ibrāhīm al-Ḥasanī al-ᶜAlamī [b] the same number of times that I visited his cousin, Sīdī Muḥammad ibn Raysūn. Once he prayed for my welfare putting his blessed hand on my forehead and silently reciting a few verses of the Mighty Qur'ān. I had brought to him two small tablets[435] on which was written the first half of sūra *al-Jumuᶜa* (*The Friday Congregation*, 62), beginning with *Whatever is in the heavens and on the earth glorifies God, the Sovereign, the Holy One* ... and after he had prayed for me and recited the Qur'ān as a blessing to me, he gave me the two tablets back, and I rejoiced greatly for this. Before that time, I had memorized only a little, but then by the blessing of this saint God opened my inner vision with a great opening and all those who knew me noticed this—may praise and thanks be to God.

I also came to know the saint Abū ᶜAbdallāh Sīdī Muḥammad Ibn Harūn al-Aghzāwī, whom I loved, venerated, frequented, and did not want to leave. At that time, he would live sometimes in Fes, sometimes Tāza, sometimes in his own region. He had made the pilgrimage three times as had been predicted for him by his shaykh, Sīdī Muḥammad ibn Hārūn al-Zajlī. He numbered among the greatest of those divinely attracted ones (*al-majādhib*), perpetually intoxicated, and rarely did sobriety come with his drunkenness, as was the case for Sīdī Muḥammad ibn Raysūn. [Sīdī Muḥammad ibn Harūn] died a martyr even as his master predicted when he said, "You will accomplish three pilgrimages then you will die a martyr." When he was returning from the last pilgrimage, he got to Wādī Wargha and drowned at the marble quarry. It was at the harvest season for wheat, but I do not know what year except that it was a year or two after entering al-Burayja, [436] and God knows better. I had first met him at the entrance of the domed area of the great imam, Mūlay Idrīs the younger,[b] and I asked him for his prayer. He said to me, "May God Most High grant that you might see the face of the Prophet ﷺ in this world and the Next." I have never seen a state as noble as his. He was both divinely attracted and methodic, or we could say intoxicated and sober. He did not outwardly manifest that he was seized by divine attraction, nor did he become dislodged from the state that was his, but rather he remained stable in his method, without excess in practice. In a word, he was strong and weak, uniting both strength and weakness within him, and there is neither doubt nor disagreement that such is a rare, precious, and noble state, not often found. By God, it is as rare in creation as the red suphur and no one reaches it except the one whose sanctity has been unveiled. And God knows better.

---

[434] This is possibly the famous collection of *ḥadīth* and sayings of the saints, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'*.

[435] See footnote 367.

I also came to know Sīdī Muḥammad ibn Jāmiᶜ رضي الله عنه who was always making spiritual journeys as I was told by someone who accompanied him on them. His origin was the Banī Azjal, who are in the region of Chefchaouen. He stopped his journeys because of a controversy that broke out between him and Mūlay al-Ṭayyib ibn Muḥammad al-ᶜAlamī, for they differed concerning the authority of the *sharīf* Sīdī Muḥammad ibn ᶜAbdallāh al-ᶜAlawī (may God have mercy upon him). Mūlay al-Ṭayyib said that the rightful sultan was Sīdī Muḥammad ibn ᶜAbdallāh, while Sīdī ibn Jāmiᶜ said that this could never be, and their disagreement grew to such an extent that Mūlay al-Ṭayyib had Ibn Jāmiᶜ thrown out of Wazzān. So he settled near the famous saint, Abū'l-Ḥasan Sīdī ᶜAlī ibn Ghālib of Qaṣr Ketāma, and it remained his residence until he passed away (may God be merciful to him). I have heard that Shaykh Mūlay al-Ṭayyib died during the time of this disagreement and Ibn Jāmiᶜ lived until the age of one hundred and twenty-five or twenty-six years old (and God knows better) and then died some years afterwards. His state was always one of contraction, for God had manifested Himself in him through His Name *al-Qābiḍ*, the One Who Contracts.

---

[436] This would be around 1774 CE. See footnote 178.

Among the miraculous things concerning him that I saw with my own eyes was that one day I was with him and with a man from my family who is someone of importance like him and who was his companion during the days of his spiritual travelling. This latter said to me, "We are going to marry you to such and such," a girl who lived in their home and whose father was one of his friends. I knew who she was because I myself had lived in his home for nearly seven years teaching his children the Qur'ān. He went on to say to me, "She is a good person, beautiful, and well-proportioned, and I am going to give you a third of the wealth that God has given me," for in fact, he had extensive land holdings. He then went on to repeat all this in the presence of Sīdī ibn Jāmiᶜ and a powerful state came over this latter until he passed away from his senses for a while. When he was again present, he took me aside and said to me, gesturing towards the man, "That one you could put in the hottest room of the *ḥammam* for seven days and not a drop of sweat would fall from him."[437] Things passed exactly as he said. The relative of which he was speaking was Mūlay ᶜAbd al-Hādī al-Darqāwī, better known as Ibn ᶜAbd al-Nabī al-Ḥasanī from the ᶜUyūn district of Fes al-Bālī.

I witnessed many extraordinary things from Sīdī ibn Jāmiᶜ. Once I found myself at his home and he said to me, "Here comes ᶜAbdallāh! Something has happened to him!" repeating this several times. I strained my ear to see if I could hear anything, but I could not. Then we walked outside his house, and there we found his relative, the *sharīf* Sīdī ᶜAbdallāh al-Ṣarghinī, who had just cut himself on a blade.

Another time I was reciting from a tablet some of the Qur'ān in the seven readings starting from the line, *You will never attain piety till you spend from that which you love* [3:92] up to the words, *Muhammad is naught but a messenger; messengers have passed before him* [3:144], when God suddenly illuminated a light in my heart, but I did nothing to show this outwardly. Rather I remained calm and continued reciting as before, as if nothing had happened. Then he said to me, "Now your lights have shone forth!" And that was truly what had happened.

---

[437] A very colloquial Moroccan way of saying that his words are empty.

Another time I was with him in the region of the Banī Yazgha. From there we made our way to the village of Azābah. This was at a time when it was dangerous because of how much rain was falling. We reached the Wād Sebū and found the river overflowing its banks. He rode into it, mounted on a large black horse, and when he reached the middle of the river, he made his horse get up onto a huge boulder that was there, just beyond which was an enormous precipice. He stopped on top of this boulder, mounted on his horse, and it looked to me as if, were he to move, he would perish. From where I was, there was nothing I could do to save him, only watch to see what God would do with him. Then, suddenly, there was light shining from his face which distracted me from looking directly at him, and in the next instant, there he was on the other bank safe and sound—praise be to God! A number of people with me witnessed this same thing, and God is a warrant for what I say.

One of his friends told me that his wife had not given birth to a child and he brought her to visit him to ask him to pray to God that would happen. He placed his blessed hand on her stomach for a moment and then said to her, "You will give birth to a male child, except that he will have one of his ears fused to his head," and that was exactly what happened.

Another of the extraordinary things concerning him is that for nearly fifty years, until his death, he never ate any food except his own so that he could be sure it was lawful. This was an extraordinary practice that encompassed all the other [extraordinary things about him], and God knows best. I once traveled with him for thirteen days during which time the provisions he had taken with him from his home ran out, so he sustained himself by eating hedgehogs, partridges, and snails. And God is a warrant for what I say.

I also came to know Sīdī Abū Bakr al-Ṭarābulsī, whom the people of Fes used to call Abū Bakr Būflāsī. I met him in Fes when I was first getting to know the city, at the time when the Muslims entered al-Burayja. He was one of those overcome by attraction to God, perpetually absent from his senses, and I became so convinced of his sanctity that one day I even drank his urine.[438]

The eminent master, Abū ᶜAbdallāh Sīdī Muḥammad ibn ᶜAlī al-Lajjā'ī, [b] told me that this saint had asked one of his students to go with him on one of his spiritual journeys, and he had agreed. They left Fes by way of Bāb al-Futūḥ and suddenly they were in front of one of the gates of Tripoli,[439] Sīdī Abū Bakr's city of origin. (I heard that he was the son of a high authority in that city who, when his son disappeared, offered a large sum of money for information concerning him). At any rate, they entered the city and roamed around in it freely, all the while not speaking, then left [by one of its gates], and suddenly they were back in front of Bāb Futūḥ in Fes again. I suspect —and God knows better— that the student he mentioned in the story was he himself.

I also knew the saint Sīdī al-ᶜArabī al-Baqqāl.[b] He was also one of the great ecstatics in God, whose ecstasy rarely combined with method. But when he would again become sober after a period of intoxication, he would never neglect any practice. Towards the end of his life, he became ever more intoxicated and reached an ever more resplendent spiritual state such that anyone who saw him or spoke with him became filled with love for him.

One day as I was departing for a journey to the region of Ḥyāna and I found him in a shop among those who sold bracelets in a state of extreme spiritual intoxication, people gathered around him, with no one speaking except him. When he saw me coming in his direction, he called to me until I was near him, then hugged me to his breast, put his tongue in my mouth, and said, "Suck, suck, suck!" Then he said, "Go! I have given you the east and the west." I then left for Ḥyāna and when I returned I found out that he had died (may God's mercy be upon him) a day or two after I had last seen him.

---

[438] As Bassām Barūd, the editor of the letters in Arabic, adds, "This incident happened at a time in [the Shaykh's life] at the beginning of the path when he himself was overcome by ecstatic states and is not something he thinks should be emulated." That being said, in a *ḥadīth* that appears in Ḥākim, *al-Mustadrak*, Ṭabarānī, *al-Kabīr*, Abū Nuᶜaym, *Dalā'il al-nubūwa*, and other sources, it is recounted that the Prophet ﷺ used to urinate into a clay vessel just outside his room in the middle of the night and that one night this was mistakenly drunk by Umm Ayman, a woman who used to serve the Prophet ﷺ and was like a mother to him. When she told him what had happened in the morning, it is recorded that he laughed and told her that she would never again suffer from stomach cramps.

[439] A journey of over 1500 miles in those days.

He had requested to be buried in in our Shaykh's zawiya in Ramīla, but our Fāsī brethren did not agree to this, so he was buried with his ancestor, Sīdī Muḥammad al-Ḥājj al-Baqqāl, the one who had been assassinated by the Saᶜdī ruler Ibn Nāṣir al-Darāwī and was buried near the little marketplace of Ibn Ṣāfī.[440]

As for visiting the [saints who are] dead, this is something I never stopped doing while I was in Fes. I did it tirelessly. I would very often visit the Imam Mūlay Idrīs the younger, Shaykh ᶜAbdallāh al-Tāwudī, the Shaykh ᶜAlī ibn Sīdī Ḥirzihim, Sīdī Ibn al-ᶜArabī al-Maᶜāfirī, Sīdī Yūsuf al-Fāsī, and Sīdī Aḥmad al-Yamanī.[b]

I would visit them regularly during the whole time I was in Fes which was for seven years, around the time that the Muslims entered al-Burayja, and through the blessing of these visits great good came my way, including my meeting with the *sharīf*, Abū'l-Ḥasan Sīdī ᶜAlī al-Jamal.[b] In short, it was by visiting the dead that I came to know the living—and may God be well pleased with all His saints, those who are living and those who have passed on. O God, accord us Your grace and to all those who follow us, even as You have accorded Your grace to those saints. O Most Generous of all those who show generosity! O Lord of the Worlds!

I would like to mention here those who taught me and who were, for me, masters and lords.

I studied with my brother Sīdī ᶜAlī (may God be merciful to him), starting with my first lessons in Arabic until I had completed two readings of the Qur'ān in the recitation of Ibn Kathīr. [441]After that I learned from the famous *faqīh*, Sīdī ᶜAbd al-Salām al-ᶜAmrānī, one of the *shurafā'* of the Banī Zarwāl, who told me one day, "Your mother and father will become famous because of you." I never met anyone like him in respect to worship: he would offer only what is obligatory, but in offering it he would never fall short or seek license regardless of the time—summer, fall, winter, or spring. I also never saw anyone complete the greater or lesser ablution faster but as impeccably as he did. Such was his noble state.

---

[440] A street in Fes al-Bālī which runs from *al-Ṭalaᶜa al-Ṣaghīra* to *al-Ṭalaᶜa al-Kabīra*.

[441] See footnote 412.

I also learned from the famous *faqīh* Sīdī Abū al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad ibn Sayūd al-Zarwālī who always maintained the ablution and sought no license in this, which is fitting for the people of the Mighty Qur'ān. Then I studied with the master Sīdī ᶜAbdallāh ibn Faraᶜīn, the master Sīdī ᶜAbdallāh ibn al-Ḥājj Ḥasūn, then with the famous *faqīh* Abū ᶜAbdallāh Muḥammad al-Laḥyānī al-Mazjālī, Sīdī al-Ṭahir al-Qaydī al-Masmūdī, Abū Hafṣ Sīdī ᶜUmar al-Jāmiᶜī, Abū ᶜAbdallāh Sīdī Muḥammad ibn ᶜAlī al-Lajjā'ī, [b] then with the head of teaching in Fes, the *sharīf* Abū Zayd Sīdī ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Idrīs al-Manjarī al-Ḥasanī. With this latter, I studied the Mighty Qur'ān from the opening sūra up to God's words, *No weariness shall befall them therein; nor shall they be expelled therefrom* [15:48]. Then he fell ill, and when his illness worsened, and the news of it spread, it was only a night and a morning before many people began arriving to visit him, people of the Qur'ān, religious scholars, people of the zāwiyas, and others. One group would come in as the other would leave and I was always close by. He could no longer speak, only gesture, until there was a moment when I looked at him and he looked at me and gestured that I approach. Then he kissed my forehead and that was his last gesture in this world, may God be merciful to him and pleased with him, and be merciful to all those who were my teachers and masters and may we benefit by their blessings.

Among the miraculous things connected to him is that if someone suffering from a fever visits his tomb, he will soon be cured of it, and I and others have experienced this. I once had a severe fever that lasted six months until Ustad al-Qaydi said to me, "Don't you that know that Shaykh ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān has a special power in regards to that?" So I paid a visit to his tomb (may God be merciful to him!) and the fever left me and has not returned to me since that day.

Also among the miraculous things concerning him is that his disciple, the famous teacher, Abū ᶜAbdallāh Sīdī Muḥammad ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān al-Tādlāwī al-Ḥasanī al-ᶜAmrānī, was returning from the Pilgrimage when he reached a bridge on the Sebū River along with some *shurafā'* who were travelling with him. Then someone said to him, "If you do not hasten on your way, you will not meet your teacher, Mūlay ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān, while he is yet alive." He did reach him while he was still alive and was able to give him a cloth for his shroud, Zamzam water, and camphor. He died shortly after that.

Also among the miraculous things attending him which people witnessed was that on the day of his death, his wife would not let him be buried that day—this took place in the early morning—even while people entreated her kindly to allow it. Then people saw the door of the room in which he lay move three times, and people rushed to the room but found no one except the departed. All those who were present saw this and understood its significance, but his wife did not want to understand it. Having seen it, however, they made haste to prepare the burial and he was buried that day, which was a Monday. They offered the funeral Prayer for him in the Qarawiyyin mosque and the imam who led the Prayer was among our masters and lords, Sīdī Abū Madyan, son of shaykh ᶜAbd al-Qādir al-Fāsi. He was buried before noon in one of the shrines of Maṭraḥ al-Janna,[442] near the masters we have mentioned, and his funeral was like that of Abū ᶜUmar al-Dānī رضي الله عنه, and may God bless our master Muḥammad and his family and companions and shower them with salutations of peace.

⁂

LETTER 247

On correct comportment and aspiration

TO ACT WITH mindfulness and care is an extremely important thing. Glad tidings are his who practices this from beginning to end. If he sees that [something] is right, he perseveres in it, and if he sees that it is in error, he abandons it and does not go back to it. For anyone following our way or some another way, for those who are deeply committed or those who are merely affiliated, we see no greater need than for training:[443] By God, we do not need more knowledge, we do not need more deeds beyond what we already have; what we need is comportment.[444]

---

[442] A cemetery outside Bāb Futūḥ in Fes.

The comportment of the servant is self-abasement.
And this comportment he never abandons,
When his self-abasement is complete,
He attains to love and draws near.

The Sufis also say, "Make your practice like salt and your comportment like flour." So my dear brothers always be mindful of what you are doing from its beginning to its end. If it is correct, then give praise and thanks to God, and if is in error, then abandon it. And know—may God teach you goodness!—that the inward reality of a person who is negligent and careless [about what he does], who does not distinguish between right and wrong, between truth and falsehood, between practices which bring about reflection and goodness and those which lead to being drowned in darkness, ignorance, and mindlessness—such a person's inward reality is benighting truth, while the inward reality of someone whose practices bring about reflection and goodness is illuminating truth.

It is of the greatest importance that you pay heed to this counsel I am giving you. In that way will you acquire strength, dignity, and success, God willing. Encourage one another towards goodness, be brothers to one another, and be constantly on guard from letting your spiritual aspiration sleep. May God deliver you from such a sleep by the honor of the Prophet ﷺ! And if you see a *faqīr* among you or among others who does not have some contact with his brothers—even if only once a month— who is not present for the circle of remembrance, and does not contribute anything to the needs of the group, then know that his spiritual aspiration is asleep and from a person in such as state, no good will come. *Peace.*

---

[443] *Al-tarbiyya,* by which he means both teaching someone and also showing him or her correct behavior and correct attitude. This same word is used for the process of raising a child.

[444] *Al-Adab,* which is what training imparts to someone. It includes both correct action, correct speech, and correct attitude.

LETTER 248

Breaking normal habits; seeing the Prophet ﷺ

I SAID TO a certain brother, "Through breaking normal habits come extraordinary benefits, but the only ones we see who can do this are those whom God takes by the hand, and they are extremely rare. Someone who is always thinking about himself, that is, about his needs, is always forgetting his Lord, just as someone who is always remembering his Lord, is always forgetting himself. The one who is always forgetting himself has no need to invoke God with his tongue for he is drowned in essential vision, even as one of them at this station said:

> No sooner do I invoke you than I am assailed by cares
> In my soul, and my heart and my spirit invoking You
> Until it is as if a watcher from You calls out to me:
> 'Beware and take care invoking, beware!
> Do you not see the signs of God flowing forth illumined
> And all His meanings being united to yours?'

May God make you and me among the people of this station by the honor of the Prophet ﷺ." And if we say, "The one who always remembers his Lord always forgets himself," this is only the case for someone who is like what Shaykh Ibn ʿAṭā'illāh describes in his *Ḥikam*: "He drinks, and increases in sobriety; he is absent, and increases in presence; his union does not veil him from his separation, nor does his separation veil him from his union; his extinction does not divert him from his permanence, nor does his permanence divert him from his extinction. He acts justly towards everyone and gives everyone his proper due." [445]

It is indispensible to break the habits of your egos and to hold fast to the *sunna* of your Prophet ﷺ, for to follow him ﷺ will bring about reflection and all manner of good. This is something well-known.

Also, listen to how I responded to some of our brothers, the jurists (*fuqahā'*) of Fes, when we were speaking about the vision of the Messenger of God ﷺ in the waking state. I mentioned to them instances of the many saintly people who had seen him, and yet they could not accept in the least anything I was saying. It has been my belief for as long as I can remember that God's friends see the Prophet ﷺ in the waking state and also that some of them died longing for this vision but never saw him. [The *fuqahā'*] said to me in response, "How can this be when the Messenger ﷺ is dead and between now and that time is more than twelve hundred years?" I had no answer whatsoever to this. I had believed that the vision of him in the waking state was possible, and as for in dreams, that is something not at all rare. On the contrary, it is very likely for any whom God honors. But then, suddenly, God in His generosity and grace enabled me to answer. I said to them: "Those who see him are not like us, for we are always engrossed in our lowest appetites and do not give them up except by the will of God. But no, by God, by God, by God… those saints are the ones who have followed the Messenger ﷺ in his words and deeds, and this gives rise to reflection which in turn conveys them from the world of obscurity that we inhabit to the world of purity, which is the world of spirits (*ᶜālam al-arwāḥ*). It is there that they see him along with immense mysteries beyond description. So they are here with us in this world of obscurity only in their forms, while their hearts or their spirits are in the world of spirits." [Hearing this], those jurists fell silent for some time. When I told them, "He is seen in the world of spirits," they ceased to speak and were content with what I said because it accorded with what they believed. Then, when I saw that they were more open to this than they had been, I added, "And if you should ask, 'Where is the world of spirits in respect to the formal world?'. I would say, 'Wherever the physical world is, there too is the world of spirits, and there too are all the worlds. In fact, it has been said that there are eighteen thousand worlds like our world—this is in *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'*.'"[446] At this, they were silent, but had they spoken, I would have spoken. The truth is sublime and there is nothing more sublime. *Peace.*

---

[445] *Op. cit.* Danner, p. 114.

⁂

LETTER 249

A strong foundation

WITH GOD'S STRENGTH and power, I assure all those who are careful concerning cleanliness, the ablution, and in completely ridding themselves of urine after urination as they should, that they will be granted a great spiritual opening of the sort God granted to the Shaykh Mūlay ᶜAbd al-Qādir al-Jilānī, Shaykh Abū Madyan al-Ghawth, Shaykh Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī,[b] and others like them (may God be pleased with them all and benefit us through their blessing).

---

[446] See footnote 87.

It is essential that you be careful concerning what I have told you, that you accomplish what your Lord has enjoined upon you, that whenever you complete one act of goodness, you begin on another, and that you turn away from bad actions totally. Make a strong foundation for your practice—self-effacement will not be genuine and will not happen without one—and there is no doubt that cleanliness, ablution, and being completely rid of urine are a large part of that foundation. In fact, I rarely see people paying close attention to these three issues, and those who give counsel concerning them are also very rare. If all of us counseled one another and were sincere in our direction, God would grant us illumination in the shortest time imaginable and this would be a great thing for all of us.

I counsel you as well to live among people with virtue. Along with that, it is be enough for you to maintain the obligatory worship and what is confirmed of the *sunna*, especially for those of you who are satisfied [with what God gives you] and are humble and accepting. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 250

On keeping the Prayer in its time

TO ALL OUR brothers in God, all those who love us for the sake of God in Morocco, in its cities and its countryside, to those who work in the world and those who have left it, may peace be upon you and the Mercy of God Most High and His Blessings.

To proceed: Anyone who desires peace in his soul and happiness, who desires to see ease in the matter before him, to have his faults covered, to have his Lord's contentment, to have his inner vision opened, to have the divine gifts accorded him be vast, to have a goodly end and an elevated rank, to see the death of his ego and the life of his spirit, should have shame before his Lord and not delay the Prayer until past its time, nor give himself license to do so, nor offer the Prayer alone as long as he is able to offer it in an assembly.

I have indeed seen many people delaying the Prayer past its time and granting themselves license in this as if it were something minor and I have seen them offering it alone even when they are in a group. What they do is in error. For to take what God ordains lightly arises from how lacking they are in the knowledge of God, and how lacking they are in fear, shame, and awe before Him.

At the same time, we see them totally absorbed by their cares and concerns, their difficulties, hardships, and tests, and unable to know from where such afflictions strike them, whereas in fact they strike them from their negligence of their religion and their preoccupation with their own individual interests and purposes (and may God curse those who lie to them). Were it not for these things, they would be flooded by all manner of goodness and their hearts would come back to life after their deaths, even as God Most High says, *Had the people of the towns believed and been reverent, We would surely have opened unto them blessings from Heaven and earth* [7:96], and *whosoever reverences God, He will appoint a way out for him* [65:2.4], and other similar things.

We also see that they do not distinguish between offering the Prayer in the first row or the last, nor do they take care to straighten the rows, even while it is a part of the perfection of the Prayer and its beauty as has been related in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* collection of al-Bukhārī.[447] All this arises from their ignorance of their religion, or rather from how little they care about it, since everyone knows that it is best to offer the Prayer in the first row.

We also see that they do not pay close attention nor give much importance to cleanliness, even while it constitutes half of faith, and the religion is based upon it as is stated in the *ḥadīth*.[448] Few of them are careful to insure they have rid themselves of urine after urinating even though this could void their ablution, and someone with no ablution has no Prayer, and someone with no Prayer has no religion, and someone with no religion has no goodness.

---

[447] Bukhārī, 11:690

[448] The *ḥadīth*, "Purification (or in some versions, "the ablution") is half of faith, praise fills the scale, (the words) 'glory and praise to God' fill all that is between the heavens and earth, the Prayer is light, charity is a witness, patience is illumination, and the Qur'ān is proof either for you or against you," appears in Muslim, Tirmidhī, Nasāᶜī, Ibn Mājah, and many other sources. The *ḥadīth* "Islām is purity, so cleanse yourselves" is in Ṭabarānī, *al-Awsaṭ*, Suyūṭī, *Jāmiᶜ al-ṣaghīr*, and other sources.

So my brothers, follow what your Lord has enjoined upon you and do not neglect the *sunna* of your Prophet ﷺ at every time and place until there comes to you what is certain, which is to say, death, [449] for God Most High has said, *Say [O Prophet], 'If you love God, follow me. God will love you,'* [3:31] and *Whatsoever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatsoever he forbids to you, forgo* [59:7]. And know (may God teach you goodness) that when the servant submits to his Lord, God makes all existence subservient to him. And God is a warrant for what I say. As one of [the Sufis] has said:

> When time is yours to use and people serve you
> Live each day as if it were the Feast.

Peace.

LETTER 251

Brief counsel

O DEAR BROTHERS, he who wishes to obtain unimaginable goodness should have shame before his Lord and not deviate from the *sunna* of His Prophet ﷺ, but rather, maintain it and not waver in it as long as he is alive and able. And in God is all success.

Or we could equally say: he who wishes to be a master among his peers and a lamp for the people of his time, should have shame before his Lord and not fall short in his religion.

LETTER 252

Practices of the heart

O DEAR BROTHERS, we do not have the knowledge that other people have nor the practice, but what we do have, by the grace of God, is a sincere heart, a pure intention, good opinion,[450] love, sincerity, longing, passion, resolution, disposition, and high aspiration. All of this belongs to the practices of the heart which come to us from God as blessings and freely-given gifts, and the smallest amount of these practices is more excellent than a mountain of physical devotions. God has servants who attain what they attain not by their knowledge, nor by their deeds, but rather by the pure grace of their Lord upon them. Among them was the great imam, our master Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq ؓ[b] about whom the Messenger of God ﷺ said, "Abū Bakr is not more excellent than you because of having offered many Prayers or many fasts, but rather because of something that God has placed in his heart."[451] There was also the great saint Sīdī Abū Yaʿzā ؓ.[b] He was illiterate, had no special religious knowledge, and it is said that he could not even read his own name written on a tablet, and yet God taught him what he did not know and made him understand what he had not understood. In fact, many of the saints are like this, and the narrations concerning them are well-known.

---

[449] This paraphrases Q. 15:99, *And worship your Lord until what is certain comes to you.*

It has reached me that a certain person of our time said, "So-and-so[452] has no knowledge of the religious sciences and yet he is always invoking the Supreme Name of God as are his disciples." Such a person does not know that God has servants who attain what they attain not by some formal means but purely by the grace of the Infinitely Generous One, and Infinite Giver. As al-Buṣīrī said,

> Enough of a miracle for you—such knowledge found
> In someone unlettered, living in the Age of Ignorance,
> And such refinement in an orphan!

And also:

> For the eye may reject the sun's light when it is inflamed
> And when the body is unwell,
> The mouth may shun even the taste of sweet water.[453]

---

[450] See footnotes 133 and 244.

[451] This is a saying quoted in al-Ghazālī, *al-Iḥyā'*.

[452] This is probably referring to the Shaykh, himself.

[453] The first of these quoted verses, which refers to the God-given wisdom of the Prophet ﷺ, is line 139 of the *Burda*, and the second, which refers to the inability of

He also does not know that anyone God Most High takes as a friend He teaches, even as it is said in the Qur'ān, *We had taught him* (meaning our master Khiḍr عليه السلام) *knowledge from Our Presence* [18:65]. Concerning him, there is a difference of opinion among the learned whether he was a prophet, a saint, or a messenger—and God knows best. It is also stated in the Qur'ān, *And He taught man that which he knew not* [96:5]. What this means, in a word, is that the saint is like a lamp, or like the full moon, or like the sun, or like the Night of Power, or that he is beyond what the rational mind can conceive. One of the Sufis said, "If the inner reality of the saint were unveiled, he would be worshipped."[454] In the light of this, what relevance do the words of the *faqīh* who said, "So-and-so knows nothing of the religious science" have to our words? What does his knowledge mean in respect to our knowledge? What does his view have to do with our view? How distant is one from the other! As one of them[455] has said,

> I used to think that union with You could be purchased
> For the price of precious wealth and profit.
> In my ignorance I deemed Your love an easy thing
> In exchange for which I gave my noble soul,
> Until I saw that it was You Who chooses
> The ones to whom to give the subtlest gifts
> And realized You were not reached by ruses,
> And so I folded my head beneath my wing
> And made my dwelling in the nest of Your love
> To be there always in my mornings and my nights.

And in the Mighty Qur'ān, … *Were it not for God's Bounty upon you, and His Mercy, you would have been among the losers* [2:64] and *Were it not for God's Bounty toward you, and His Mercy, you would surely have followed Satan, save a few* [4:83], *And were it not for God's Bounty toward you, and His Mercy, not one of you would ever be pure. But God purifies whomsoever He will*

---

some who were around him to recognize him as a prophet, is line 104. Spiker, *op. cit.*

[454] This is a saying of Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Mursī, quoted in *Laṭā'if al-Minan*, which continues "because his attributes are God's Attributes, and his traits are God's Traits." See Dār al-Maʿārif edition, page 52-53.

[455] In some editions these lines are attributed to al-Ghazālī.

[24:21]. And in the *ḥadīth*, "Not one of you will enter heaven by his deeds," and when they asked, "Not even you, O Messenger of God?" he replied, "Not even me unless my Lord envelops me in His mercy."[456]

LETTER 253

Pretenders and people with the hearts of Prophets (God's blessings and salutations of peace be upon them)

O MY BROTHERS! I do not see anyone who has succeeded in bringing people back to their Lord and Master from their state of heedlessness except the Companions and the Successors, and those who followed them such as our imams al-Junayd, al-Jīlānī, al-Ghazālī, al-Shādhilī,[b] and their like رضي الله عنهم. They were the ones who combined knowledge and deeds, the Law and the Truth, intoxication and sobriety. As we see no one superior to them in this respect except as God so wills.

We also see many of the people of our time who take shaykhs not for the purpose of drawing nearer to God, but rather for selfish interests and ambitions. Indeed, how many have come to me desiring to take the litany, adamantly insisting that I give it to them. But their intention in doing so has been so that people might consider them as shaykhs, or that they might beg from people wearing what we wear, that is, having the outward appearance of *tajrīd* as it is known to people of our land.[457] They also desire to write down my teachings for this same purpose. All of this is entirely vain with no intrinsic value. If I mention it to you here, it is only because of what I see of people's states, their corrupt intentions, and the extent to which they are immersed in what holds no benefit. It is almost as if the world had suddenly become devoid of the people of outward knowledge and inward knowledge alike—may God forbid! In fact, it is full of those with whose hearts are like the heart of Muḥammad ﷺ, or the hearts of Noah, Hūd, David, Shuᶜayb, Seth, Ṣāliḥ, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Khiḍr (upon all of whom be peace), and others, for we see that every one of God's saints bears the traits of one of the Prophets, upon them and upon our Prophet be

---

[456] A *ḥadīth* found in all the main collections.

[457] By which he means wearing a patched cloak, tunic, or jellaba.

God’s blessings and salutations of peace. And we see that God has servants whom He knows and who know Him, whom He loves, and who love Him, whom He exalts and who exalt Him, whom He venerates and who venerate Him, whom He respects and who respect Him. He is with them wherever they are even as they are with Him wherever He is, which is to say everywhere, for they are always in His Presence. The master, Sīdī Ibn ᶜAṭā’illāh, said [103]: “The imperative need of the gnostic never vanishes nor is his repose in anything but God.”

⁂

LETTER 254

Returning to the saying of Shaykh al-Zarrūq ؓ

O BROTHERS! There is nothing more useful for all of us than to have sincere intention, a good opinion of people, and to accept them without considering whether someone close to God is actually far, or whether someone far from God is actually close, for God Himself has said, *And none knows the hosts of your Lord but He* [74:31]. For the All-Powerful (*al-Qādir*), nothing is impossible. How many have there been who were *like stones or harder still* [2:74] and then burst open with a spring of wisdom flowing from their hearts to their tongues. This is something well-known, and it is as God says: *For indeed among stones are those from which streams gush forth, and indeed among them are those that split and water issues from them, and indeed among them are those that crash down from the fear of God* [2:74].

Bear witness, dear brothers, that I have come to accept the saying of Sīdī Aḥmad al-Zarrūq al-Fāsī, “There is no shaykh after this beard,”[458] after having rejected it and not wanting to hear it said for more than fifty years. Now I have come to understand what it really means, may praise and thanks be to God. [Sīdī Aḥmad] had seen so many pretenders and had seen their number increasing, all of them claiming to be shaykhs, while in truth there was not one among them who knew what the degree of the shaykh was and what the degree of the disciple was. So his heart had become so constricted and his thoughts so narrowed, that he said what he said, may God correct it and strengthen us with those like (Shaykh Zarrūq).

---

[458] This saying is quoted in al-Kūhin, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shādhiliyyat al-Kubrā*, p. 119, who records that “he was commanded by the tongue of his spiritual state to say in the arena of men (or saints), holding onto his beard....” the quoted phrase.

But God forbid that his intention be what certain ignorant people have taken it to be, which is that shaykhs of teaching and training would disappear and that all who were left in this world were pretenders. They did not hear the words of God Most High: *No sign do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but that We bring that which is better than it or like unto it. Do you not know that God is Powerful over all things? Do you not know that unto God belongs Sovereignty over the heavens and the earth, and that you have neither protector nor helper apart from God?* [2:106-107].[459] Or His words: *They desire to extinguish the Light of God with their mouths. But God refuses to do aught but complete His Light, though the disbelievers be averse* [9:32].

Know, my brothers, if someone wants to understand Sīdī Aḥmad Zarrūq's saying in any other way than we have explained, ... it is because he does not know that if even there is even only one true shaykh in existence, it will be enough for all the servants of God alive at that moment because that one shaykh is like the sun which shines upon all and illuminates all. But if that one true shaykh is lacking, thousands of others will not suffice.

This is our view, and we see none other more inclusive. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 255

You will be your own shaykhs

O BROTHERS, IT is nearly fifty years since I said to certain of our brothers, "If you follow my way, you can say what you wish to any of your fellow men without wounding them." And some years later, I said to them, "By God, if I did not think I could bring you to your goal, I would not have begun the journey with you. I only set out with you to help you reach your goal." And now I say to them, "If you listen to me and follow me, I will not leave in your souls any imbalance, confusion, or intoxication. I will leave you as shaykhs to yourselves and to others, without your needing anyone else of your time. Any time you are in need of something, you will find it in yourselves." And God is a warrant for what we say. *Peace.*

---

[459] This interpretation appears in the introductory chapter of *Laṭā'if al-minan* as a quote from Abū al-ᶜAbbās al-Mursī: "That is, 'We do not remove one of Our saints without bringing another in his place who is better or else like him'." See Dār al-Maᶜārif edition, page 36.

⁂

LETTER 256

Speak only about what is clear; visions at the beginning of his way

O MY BROTHERS, bear witness that I do not write down for people what will confound their minds and obscure their hearts. I only write down for them what their minds can accept, and by which their breasts can be expanded. For I have seen many of the *fuqarā'* among the earlier and later folk speaking about very subtle spiritual meanings and writing them down for people without knowing their outward aspect let alone their inward aspect. But I do not journey by myself or with others except where the path is wide, not narrow. If a person is sincere in his practice, he will profit by means which are well-known to everyone, and if not, he will not profit no matter what he knows.

In a word: if someone speaks about esoteric subtleties—things that are strange and rare—without knowing the exoteric dimension, his words are of no use, and he is either ignorant or forsaken. We say—and may God make our words clear and strengthen us by the Book and the *sunna*—that we also have the blessing of the early believers which comes to the people of later times as it came to me when I was young, may God be praised. About seven years after having reached puberty, I was pushed with a powerful push towards the Presence of my Lord and suddenly I was no longer I, but rather some other I after having been I, for I was transformed, which is to say my attributes and traits became covered by the Attributes and Traits of my Lord, such that after having been I, I was He. Then my impotence became power, my weakness became strength, my poverty became wealth, my lowliness became honor, my ignorance became knowledge, and so forth. I was transformed into a vast ocean of knowledge such that had I been asked a thousand questions, I would have been able to answer each one with an ample and concise response. And God is a warrant for what I say.

Also by God's grace to me and the blessings of those who have gone before which came to me, about five years after having reached puberty I saw our beloved master, the first and best of all creation and its master, the Messenger of God ﷺ, in the mosque of Sīdī ᶜAbd al-Wārith al-Yalṣūtī,[b] and at the same moment I saw him, I saw his daughter, our lady Fāṭima al-Zahrā' ﵂[b] This was in a dream that was like the waking state, and after my vision, for about ten days, my eyes kept overflowing with tears, and my heart kept speaking to me of mighty matters—of love, and of yearning.

The greatest of those who went before was the evident and peerless mystery, our master and the master of creation, the Messenger of God ﷺ and the pure people of his house ﵃ about whom he said, "The stars are protection for the folk of the heavens and the people of my house are protection for the folk of the earth. When the stars go from the sky, there will come to the folk of the heavens what is promised them and when the people of my house go, there will come to the folk of the earth what is promised them".[460] There are many branches [of *shurafā'*] (may God increase them and grant us the provision of their love) and in each branch there are a great number of the people of spiritual perfection, people of knowledge and deeds, who combine the Law and the Truth, intoxication and sobriety.

The textual evidence for how a blessing from those who went before can come to those who come after is found in the words of God Most High *And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city, and beneath it was a treasure belonging to them. Their father was righteous, and your Lord desired that they should reach their maturity and extract their treasure, as a mercy from your Lord* [18:82]. The father mentioned in the verse, according to the scholars, was their great grandfather seven or even fourteen generations before, but what I understand (and God knows best) is that he was the first of the saintly ancestors. We have spoken of the spiritual power of permission in previous letters.[461]

---

[460] *Ḥadīth* found in Ḥākim, *al-Mustadrak*, Ṭabarānī, *al-Awsaṭ*, Abū Yaᶜlā, *Sunan*, and several other sources.

[461] See letters 13 and 69.

⁂

LETTER 257

Expecting miracles

O BROTHERS, FOR one of God's servants who is upright (*mustaqīm*), it is impossible that the miraculous things by which God honors His friends رضي الله عنهم will not happen to him as well. But we have seen many *fuqarā'*, both earlier and later, wanting and expecting such things to happen to them. Then, if they did not appear, their intentions towards their shaykhs and their paths were ruined, their opinions (of the way) turned negative, and they were ruined except for those upon whom God had mercy .

They did not know that such miraculous things do not appear unless there is perfect uprightness, even as the great shaykh Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh said, [29] "For you to be looking for your own hidden faults is better for you than to be looking for mysteries that are veiled from you."

⁂

LETTER 258

The man who said, "Nothing has appeared to me"

O MY BROTHERS, if someone who is truly a shaykh does not have the respect, modesty, awe, fear, reverence, and honor of his disciple, then that disciple will never benefit from him, and if benefit is absent, there is no meaning for the master or the disciple in their relationship. So hear what I have to say to you and heed it as much as you can, and may God accord you His grace and help you:

Once I was reading a certain book with such deep concentration--and had been for a quite a while—that I was unaware of anything else around me. Then a certain brother came and sat down facing me nearby. Finally I became aware of him and I asked, "How long have you been there?" He answered, "Since you sat down," and I had been sitting for a long time. I said to him, "Is there anything wrong?" He answered "I have known you thirteen years and nothing has appeared to me."[462] As soon as I heard this from him, I said, "By God, you have not known me. You have known only yourself. Where have you been all this time?." He said, "I have been in a certain land." I said, "And where are your wife and where are your children?" (for there was a number of them, and the time was one of hardship, not ease). He said, "They are in the tent." And at that moment he realized what I was saying to him and that [what he had] was by God's accord and that what he had said to me was something that arises from the desires which play with people. And God is a warrant for what I say.

⁂

LETTER 259

"The unique one (*al-fard*)"

O MY BROTHERS. When I sought to identify the different spiritual types which characterize men of the Way, I suddenly had a major illumination, as if God wanted to allow me to contemplate them all, the living and the dead, the ancient and the modern, *And that is no great matter for God* [14:20, 35:17]. I saw that there were three categories. The first were those whose journey was more methodic than ecstatic, and they were many. The second were those whose journey was more ecstatic than methodic, and they were fewer in number. The third were those whose intoxication was always joined with the lucidity of their minds. Their method was not more powerful than their ecstasy, nor their ecstasy more powerful than their method. They were intoxicated and sober. They combined both states within themselves in equilibrium. People such as these are rare in this world and irreplaceable, for their degree is the most sublime and not every one of them attains it in its highest degree. In fact, only one of them attains it completely, and that one is called "the unique one" (*al-fard*), for [his station of perfection] is uniquely for him to attain and thus does he merit this name. So it is said about such a person, "He is unique (*farīd*) to his age, alone (*waḥīd*) in his time." The great saint Sīdī Ibn ᶜArabī al-Ḥātimī[b] said, "In God's knowledge, the Unique one is greater than the Pole." *Peace.*

---

[462] By which he meant that nothing miraculous had happened to him nor had he had any spiritual visions.

⁂

LETTER 260

The Prayer (*al-ṣalāt*)

O MY BROTHERS, there is no greater deed for us, after the two-fold testimony, than the Prayer. It is the first thing that God made obligatory for us and it is the first thing we will be asked about on the Day of Resurrection. If there had been some other practice greater than the Prayer, then it would have been the first to be obligatory upon us, but the Prayer contains so many special virtues that the mind cannot grasp them all. It is enough as proof of its excellence that it forbids lewdness and mischief, as the Qur'ān tells us.[463] So do not disregard its importance. Rather—without fail, without fail — bring care and attentiveness to accomplishing it and accomplishing the conditions for its validity. And may God Most High accord you and us his grace.

⁂

LETTER 261

Respect for the shaykh

O MY BROTHERS, if a shaykh of teaching and training does not have the respect, modesty, awe, fear, reverence, and honor of his disciple, then that disciple will not benefit from him, and if benefit is absent, and there is no meaning either for the master or the disciple in their relationship.

Therefore, it is not right for a disciple to say to his master, "Give me permission to leave the workaday world," or "Give me permission to be in the workaday world," or "Give me permission to invoke the Name," or "Give me permission to beg," or "Give me permission to wear the patched robe," or "Give me permission to wear a turban," ... and so forth. What is correct for him is to give up his will to his master and become like a dead person in the hands of the washer, and not to leave him until God fulfills his need either sooner or later. When a disciple wants his shaykh to follow him in his opinion, then he becomes the shaykh, and the shaykh becomes the disciple, and when essential meanings of things become reversed, it a kind of heresy.

---

[463] *Recite that which has been revealed to you of the Book, and perform the Prayer. Truly prayer prevents indecency and abomination, but the remembrance of God is surely greater. And God knows whatsoever you do* [29:45].

One can equally say that the master is the imam of the disciple; or as the Prophet ﷺ said in a *ḥadīth* found in Bukhārī, "The imam is only there to be followed."[464] Such is our view, and God knows best.

Also know (may God teach you goodness and preserve you from evil) that a man once came to see me and very soon afterwards said, "Give me permission to recite the litany," and was very insistent in asking for it. I paid no attention to him neither that day, nor that night, but when he returned to me again, I gave him permission, upon which he immediately said to me, "Give me permission to transmit it to other people." As soon as I heard this, I answered, "Wait until you know me and I know you. Then it will be something good." That reminded me of the story about the *maddīḥ* who was buried and as soon as the two questioning angels (God's blessings and salutations of peace be upon them) came to him, he said to them, "Blessings upon my master Muḥammad! Now ... what's the occasion?"[465]

There is nothing wrong, however, if the disciple consults with his shaykh concerning important issues such as marriage, or the Pilgrimage, or agriculture, or building, or travel, or the like ... *Peace.*

LETTER 262

More concerning the Prayer (*al-ṣalāt*)

O MY BROTHERS! There are many ways to attain happiness and salvation, and the greatest of them, after the two-fold testimony, is the

---

[464] A *ḥadīth* found in all the main collections.

[465] *Maddīḥūn* are those whose profession it is to go to large gatherings and parties and chant long orisons of blessings upon the Prophet ﷺ or possibly upon other notables. Since they are often paid for this in Morocco, some of them are seen as less than sincere. The two questioning angels, which some *ḥadīth* mention by name as al-Munkar and al-Nakīr (see Tirmidhī, ibn Ḥibbān, and Bayhaqī), are those who come to someone shortly after he or she has been laid in the grave and ask "concerning this man," by whom is meant the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ.

In the context of the letter, the vignette is meant to show someone who is unaware of what is fitting for his state.

Prayer. It is the first thing that God made obligatory upon us and it is the first thing we will be asked about on the Day of Resurrection. If there had been some other practice greater than the Prayer, then it would have been the first, but the Prayer contains so many special virtues that the mind cannot grasp them all, and this is why the Messenger of God ﷺ told us that Prayer offered in its time is better that the world and all it contains.[466] It is enough as a proof of its excellence that it forbids indecency and abomination, as the Book of God Most High tells us: *Truly the Prayer prevents indecency and abomination …* [29:45], and one of the learned has said, "The relationship of the Prayer to the religion is like the head to the body, and the relationship of Sufism to the religion is like the soul to the body."

We say, as the Prophet ﷺ said, that the Prayer is the mainstay of the religion,[467] so do not neglect it. It is absolutely essential that you accomplish it and accomplish its necessary conditions with attention and care, as long as you are alive and able, and may God accord you His grace and help.

Know that we have repeated practices such as the Prayer, the recitation of the Qur'ān, the invocation of *lā ilāha illā Allāh*, and the invocation of blessings upon the Messenger of God ﷺ many times over these years, and we have found great blessings in all of them, but the blessings found in repeating the Prayer have been greater than in any other practice. Indeed, if it were not for such sayings of the masters as, "He who has no master, the Devil is his master," and "He who has no shaykh has no direction (*qibla*)," and "He who has no master has no worth," and "To do away with intermediary means leads to perdition, while to attribute results to them is error," we would say that with the Prayer, one has no need for a shaykh. Indeed, this would also be true for the recitation of the Qur'ān, the invocation of *lā ilāha illā Allāh*, and the invocation of blessings upon the Messenger ﷺ. All of these could take the place of a shaykh for us, especially if we also avoided things that held no benefit for us, and depended upon our Lord, not upon our actions, even if they are pure and consecrated totally to God.

---

[466] The *ḥadīth*, "The best practice is the Prayer offered at the beginning of its time," appears in the *sunan* collections of Abū Dāwūd and Bayhaqī, in Ḥākim, *al-Mustadrak*, and other sources.

[467] Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab al-Īmān*, ᶜAjlūnī, *Kashf al-khafā'*, Suyūṭī in *al-Jāmiᶜ al-ṣaghīr*, and other sources.

Moreover, our Lord is only worshipped with knowledge, so we should not neglect it. This is indispensible, so approach it with as much care and attention as long as you are alive and able. The one who neglects knowledge, neglects the Prayer, and neglects what God has enjoined upon him is himself neglected and abandoned before God.

LETTER 263

The last words of his shaykh

O MY BROTHERS, if you wish to be open to the gifts of God—or we could also say, the spiritual breezes from God[468]—then have shame before your God and do not deviate from the *sunna* of His Messenger ﷺ. Rather, be firm and unwavering in keeping it as long as you are alive and able, as we have said numerous times. Know that the last thing I heard from the great shaykh, Sīdī ᶜAlī al-Jamal al-ᶜAmrānī, was "Be open to the spiritual breezes of God." *Peace.*

LETTER 264

The excellence of knowledge

O MY BROTHERS! For anyone who realizes the excellence of knowledge and its blessing, the journey from the west to the east and from the east to the west is easy and something minor for him. For our Lord is not worshipped except by way of knowledge, and no person can be true and sincere [in his worship] except that one who knows, even as the *ḥadīth* of the Messenger of God ﷺ states that "To whomever God wishes goodness, He grants understanding of the religion."[469] And in God is all success.

---

[468] See letter 297.

[469] Bukhārī, Muslim, and all other main sources.

⁂

LETTER 265

Caution against sharing these writings with everyone

O MY BROTHERS! I strongly advise you not to read our writings nor the writings of Sīdī ᶜAlī our shaykh ﵁ to anyone who is not of the Way. This is very important, because the envier who hears our words or the words of our master will insult you as people have insulted those greater in knowledge, practice, state, and station than we, such as Sīdī al-Shādhilī, Sīdī al-Ḥātimī, Sīdī al-Shaᶜrānī, and their like. If you wish to know what happened to them because of the envious, then look at *Al-Yawāqīt wa'l-Jawāhir fī bayyān ᶜaqā'id al-akābir* written by Sīdī al-Shaᶜrānī. It contains things that are amazing and strange concerning the harm that came to masters in the Way at the hands of the envious. In reality, however, these things are [spiritual] breezes for people of sincerity, even as one of them said:

> My foes are a blessing and a gift to me.
> May the Most-Merciful not keep them away!
> They search out my errors so that I can avoid them
> And vie against me to make me ascend.[470]

I believe, however, that most of the insult and hurt that came to those masters came before they had perfected their states. Against those who do, who combine knowledge and deeds, the Law and the Truth, intoxication and sobriety, there is no proof of error to cite, while they themselves are a proof against all others. It is also unlikely that they could be insulted, for the most perfect of creation, our master Muḥammad ﷺ, suffered great hurt and insult, as did our masters Abraham, Moses, and others (God's blessings and salutations of peace be upon them), for the messengers are first tested and then they prevail, as it is stated in Bukhārī.[471] *Peace.*

---

[470] These lines are attributed to Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalūsī al-Gharnāṭī al-Nafzī (d. 745/1344).

[471] Bukhārī, *Jihād*, Ḥ. 2782.

⁂

LETTER 266

What knowledge is most useful

TO ALL OUR brothers in God, all those who love us for the sake of God in Morocco, in its cities and its countryside, to those who work in the world and those who have left it, may peace be upon you and the Mercy of God Most High and His Blessings. To proceed:

I counsel you for the sake of God and in hopes of God's contentment not to get overly involved in [learning] all the [variant] recitations of the Immense Qur'ān as many of our Jabāla people and others do so that they are not satisfied until they have memorized the seven recitations, or the ten recitations, and they have this always before their eyes. At the same time, many of them do not even know the obligatory and the *sunna*, nor can they even recite the Fātiḥa correctly, nor give the call to Prayer or the *iqāma* correctly. So clearly this is a big mistake.[472]

What is correct—or we could say, the truth—is that we cannot dispense with learning the rites of our religion correctly. In *fiqh*, it is enough for us to study the *Risāla* of Sīdī Muḥammad Abū Zayd al-Qayrawanī, or *Rubᶜ al-ᶜibāda* of Shaykh al-Khalīl, or even *al-Murshid al-Muᶜīn* of Sīdī ᶜAbd al-Wāḥid ibn ᶜĀshir. Those are enough for us in *fiqh*, and in recitation of the Qur'ān, the Warsh[b] recitation is enough for us as well, though we are not averse to reciting in any of the recitations. We like it a great deal, but accord in this is from God, and there is no strength nor power except through Him.

Listen to what I told one of the brothers who asked my advice about going to Māzūna to study the religious sciences.[473] I said to him, among other things, "For anyone who knows the merits of knowledge and its blessing, it is an easy thing, even something minor, to travel in search of it from the west to the east and from the east to the west, since our Lord is not worshipped except by knowledge, and there is none among people who are genuine and honest except the one who is truly learned. In a *ḥadīth*, the Messenger of God ﷺ is reported to have said, "Seek knowledge even in China,"[474] and "To whomever God wishes goodness, He grants understanding of the religion."[475] and also, "To teach one chapter of knowledge is better than possessing the world in its entirety."[476] So how amazing it is that someone can hear of the virtues of knowledge as the Prophet ﷺ described them, without doubt or disagreement, and yet not devote the days of his life to learning.

---

[472] Study of religious knowledge in Morocco traditionally begins with memorization of the entire Qur'ān, and then continues to *fiqh* and ᶜ*aqīda*. In this letter, the Shaykh is cautioning his students not to get carried away with memorization at the expense of learning what is needed to correctly accomplish the rites of the religion. See also our introduction.

[473] A town in Algeria about 200 km north of Oran where a famous school of religious studies was founded in 1029/1619.

We also believe (and God knows best) that in respect to the Prayer, we should most certainly know the explanation (*tafsīr*) of the sūras we most often recite. Our view, which is one of the loftiest, is that practice without knowledge is invalid. In God's book we find, *I did not create jinn and mankind, save to worship Me* [51:56], *They were not commanded but to worship God, devoting religion entirely to Him* [98:5]. Assuredly, practice without knowledge has no value, and here we are only saying what everyone has said.

How amazing that someone can hear, by the intermediary of the Messenger ﷺ, the Companions, and the successors, and other imams of the religion, about the Paradisiacal bliss that God has prepared for the pious—"what no eye has ever seen, nor ear has ever heard, nor human heart has ever imagined,"[477]—and then not devote the rest of his days to obeying his Lord.

If there were no other blessings for the pious in Paradise except that human beings will be served by seventy thousand Houris, who will stand when they stand and sit when they sit, Houris whose smiles or laughter light up the distance of five-hundred year journey, that would be enough. May God not deprive you or us of this bliss, by the honor of the Prophet ﷺ, nor deprive the rest of community of our master Muḥammad, may God bless him, shower him with salutations of peace, ennoble, honor, and glorify him in abundance until the Day of Judgment, and *Peace be upon the message bearers, and praise be to God, Lord of the worlds* [37:181].

---

[474] Bayhaqī, *Shuᶜab al-Īmān*, ᶜAjlūnī, *Kashf al-khafā'*, Suyūṭī in *al-Jāmiᶜ al-ṣaghīr*, and other sources.

[475] See footnote 469.

[476] We do not find a source for this.

[477] Bukhārī, Muslim, and all other main sources.

LETTER 267

Offering the Prayer on time

I COUNSEL YOU—the generality and the elect, men and women, old and young, bondsmen and free—towards what God has enjoined upon you, and that is that you do not delay the Prayer past its time, nor give yourself license to do so, and that you offer the Prayer in assembly, not alone, except if there is some excuse to do so, which rarely happens.

I say this because I have seen many brothers delaying the Prayer past its time and giving themselves license to do so. I also see them offering the Prayer singly even if they are together, and what they are doing is quite wrong. Even if they are among the people of the heart, they are in a state of spiritual sobriety, not intoxication, not lost to their senses, in which case they might be excused. Be careful concerning this. Forget your own selves in the remembrance of your Lord and not the opposite, which is to forget your Lord because of being so involved in remembering your own selves. And by someone who remembers himself, I mean someone who plunges into his appetites and desires and becomes drowned in them. As for the one who forgets himself, he is drowned only in spiritual inspirations and insights as all God's saints have been drowned ﵃ before leaving those behind as well, ashamed that their Lord should see them involved with anything else but Him. So understand well, and may God help you in this. Avoid what has been prohibited to you, occupy yourselves with what has been enjoined upon you, and may God grant you His accord.

Know, too, that I see many of the brothers constantly plagued by worries and cares, sadness, and a sense of injury. This is because of their having turned away from their Lord and turned towards their desires. If they did the opposite—turned towards their Lord and away from their desires—cares, worries, sadness, and obscurity would leave them on the spot, even as God Most High says, *Had the people of the towns* *believed and been reverent, We would surely have opened unto them blessings from Heaven and earth* [7:97], and *Whosoever reverences God, He will appoint a way out for him and will provide for him whence he reckons not. And whosoever trusts in God, He suffices him. Truly God fulfills His Command* [65:2,3], and *For the one who fears God He makes things easy—That is the Command of God that He has sent down unto you* [65:2,4] ... and there are many other verses and *ḥadīth* which attest to this. *Peace.*

⁂

LETTER 268

Finding rest in the remembrance of God

I GIVE YOU counsel towards God for the sake of God and seeking His contentment: hold fast to the Muhammadan *sunna*. It is the citadel against every tribulation, the ark which will deliver you, and the mine of mysteries and goodness in every time and place. Hold fast to it until there comes to you what is certain, that is, death.

If you are confused concerning a certain matter and feeling a constriction in your chest because of it, such that your situation is becoming ever more difficult, and you have no ruse to turn to, do not let yourself plunge deeper and deeper into it by pondering upon it, and do not try to be the one who always chooses, which is the way of the heedless (may God be kind to us and them). Rather, occupy yourselves with what your Lord has enjoined upon your: offer Prayers, recite the Qur'ān, invoke the formula "There is no god but God (*lā ilāha illā Allāh*)," invoke blessings upon the Messenger of God ﷺ, or learn some piece of knowledge, and so forth, and God will grant you relief and a way out of your difficulty as He does for His friends ؓ.

Know too that the renowned shaykh, Sīdī ʿAbdallāh al-Tustarī ؓ, one of the greatest of the Sufis, used to say, "Give up self-direction and choice, for they are what fill people's lives with worry,"[478] and I would add that they are what distract people from the remembrance of their Lord. The remembrance of God is a citadel for the believer and a means by which tranquility descends upon him so that he ceases to be confused, or troubled, or fearful, or careworn, or worried. Thus does the Qur'ān mention *Those who believe and whose hearts are at peace in the remembrance of God* [13:28]. Tranquility descends through the remembrance of God, and he who wants to know this with certainty and truth need only make it a regular practice, done with stillness, reverence, respect, in a state of cleanliness as defined by the noble *sunna*, and relying upon God Most High. Such is our view and it is one of the loftiest, but God knows best. *Peace.*

---

[478] Quoted in Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'*, in the chapter on Tustarī.

◆

LETTER 269

Rejoice if something in the world is taken from you

IF SOMETHING OF this lower world is denied you, rejoice for this great and evident goodness as did the earliest of the faithful ﵃ who, when the world slipped through their fingers, would say, "We welcome the emblem of the saintly."[479] I heard from the renowned shaykh, my master Abū'l-Ḥasan Sīdī ᶜAlī al-Jamal ﵁, that he had threshed three bushels of wheat in Waṭṭī Miṣfar[480] and when he told his master, Sīdī al-ᶜArabī ibn ᶜAbdallāh from the Makhfiyya neighborhood in Fes al-Bālī about that, the latter responded, "If you increase in the sensory, you decrease in the spiritual." Sīdī ᶜAlī had also been in a state of lowliness, then returned to a state of exaltation and when his master, Sīdī al-ᶜArabī, saw this, he said to him, "When you were lowly, you had ninety-nine parts of honor and one of humility, and now you have ninety-nine parts of humility and one of honor." So understand, and may God help you and us to do so. Be mindful of the Beloved, pay no attention to anything else, and say:

> Love is my religion. I want nothing in its place.
> Beauty is a sovereign that's obeyed whether fair or unjust,
> The soul is precious, but for You I spend it freely.

---

[479] This is from a narrative found in Daylamī's *Musnad al-firdaws*, Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Zuhd*, quoted by al-Qurṭubī in his *Tafsīr*, and by several other classic sources, which states that God said to Moses ﵇, "If you see wealth coming your way, say, 'Here is a sin whose time has come.' And if you see poverty coming your way, say, 'Welcome to the emblem of the saintly'."

[480] An area outside Bāb al-Jīsa in the northeastern corner of Fes.

Humility is bitter, but with Your contentment it turns sweet.
O You with Whose love my punishment is sweet
I do not complain to You of rejection nor fatigue.

And in the same sense:

Be humble before the One you love to merit honor,
For what honor a person attains by being lowly.
If the One you love is precious and if you are not lowly before Him
Then bid goodbye to all hopes of arrival.
If you cannot bear humility in love,
You will part from the Beloved in disgrace.

And there are other such sayings of the people of the path, may God ennoble us by their mention and make us among their ranks, purely by His grace and generosity and by the honor of the Messenger of God ﷺ.

Lastly, I urge Sīdī Muḥammad al-Ḥarrāq,[b] the *sharīf* and scholar, to read these, my letters, to all the rest of those who love us in our region, may God bless them all. *Peace.*

Letter 270

Invoking the Supreme Name

O MY BROTHERS! If any of you or anyone else wants his fire to become his garden, he should not waver in respect to the *sunna*. It is the ark of salvation and the mine of mysteries and goodness. He who sails upon it is saved, and he who stays behind drowns. Let him be kind to his soul in all other matters and not take on more than he can do, following the saying of the Prophet ﷺ "Neither I nor the pious ones of my community have anything to do with *takalluf*."[481] And also, "Only take on the practice that you have the strength to do, for while God does not grow weary, you yourselves do."[482] But actions which are heavy for the ego are better than those which are light. In fact, only those actions which are heavy for the ego are true and as such are the quickest to bring a response and the quickest to bring illumination.

---

[481] See footnote 248.

[482] See footnote 109.

Such is the case with the invocation of the Supreme Name, the Name of Majesty, *Allāh*, for the one who invokes it must observe conditions which weigh very heavily upon the ego and are not easy for it. These include that his body, clothes, and the place where he sits must be ritually pure and clean, that he then visualizes the five letters of the Name, that he keep this visualization before his eyes, and that as often as it vanishes, he returns to it immediately, so that if it vanishes a hundred times, he returns to it a hundred times. [As he does this] he should pronounce the Name and sustain its utterance for as long as he has breath, such that he says, *Allāāāāh*, and not *Allāh, Allāh*. He must also avoid all that does not concern him.[483]

For the one who invokes God following this method and is careful concerning the conditions we have mentioned, a small amount of practice will be enough and God will lift the veil between Him and the invoker in three weeks or fewer, whereas if he practices this method for more than seven weeks and this does not occur, it is an indication that he lacks spiritual intention, sincerity, resolve, or certainty, and may God be a warrant for what I say. But if he accomplishes these acts and other practices of the heart [484] with the best opinion (of God) and with a pure intention, then an atom's worth of practice will be better than a mountain of purely physical worship. The veil will be lifted, the doors will open, and he will be immersed in what is good and right, by the grace of the Infinitely Generous, the Giver of all Gifts (*al-Karīm al-Wahhāb*), glorified be He! There is no god but He!

The objective of this visualization of the letters of the Name and this mode of invocation is to restrain the self from plunging into the sensory world and into what is incorrect, for the sensory world is op-

---

483 That is, during the invocation he should try not to mentally follow every thought that comes to mind, and before and after the invocation, he should avoid getting involved in things that do not concern him (following the *ḥadīth* first quoted in footnote 15 above) which generally fill the mind with even more distraction.

484 Important to add here is that these letters were originally addressed to those who were part of the Ṭarīqah at the time and who therefore had permission from the Shaykh to practice this invocation. See also our introduction.

posite the spiritual world, and opposites do not meet. As soon as the invoker ceases to be engrossed in the sensory word, there will come to him spiritual intuitions and insights from the Unseen World which were previously unknown to him. But these, too, will distract him from the visualization of the Name, just as the sensory world does. If he turns away from these, however, and returns quickly to the visualization, the intuitions will overflow within him more and more powerfully, and bear him in the shortest time into the Presence of his Lord, be He glorified. There he will find mysteries and goodness which "no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard, and no human heart has ever imagined."[485] And God is a warrant for what we say.

This method may only be followed by people of subtle intelligence. It is not a way for all.

⁂

LETTER 271

The one needful thing

O MY BROTHERS! I strongly advise, counsel, and urge you not to neglect the remembrance of your Lord as He has enjoined upon you—standing, sitting, and lying on your sides[486] and in every state. For neither we, nor you, nor anyone really needs anything else. It is absolutely essential that you hear what I am saying to you and not forget this, nor disregard it, nor be mindless of it. Nearly fifty-five years ago, this is what I said to certain brothers: every single human being is in need of many things, but in reality all of them are in need of one thing: the true remembrance of God Most High. If they have this, there is nothing that they lack whatever else they may lose. And God is a warrant for what I say. Then, some time after having said this, I found in a treatise by Imam Sīdī Abū'l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī on the beautiful Names of God, that a disciple said to his shaykh, "O master, we need food!." And the shaykh answered, "God!" The disciple said, "O master, we absolutely need food!" And shaykh answered, "We absolutely need

---

[485] See footnote 477. This *ḥadīth* is understood literally to be speaking of Paradise.

[486] *When you have completed the prayer, remember [and invoke] God, standing, sitting, or lying on your sides* [4:103].

God!" Then, some time after this, I found in the *Ḥikam* of Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh the words: "He who has lost You—what has he found? He who has found You—what has he lost? Whoever takes someone other than You as a substitute is disappointed, and whoever wants to stray from You is lost."[487]

Without fail, without fail—be steady in the remembrance of your Lord as He has commanded you, hold as tightly as you can to your religion, and God Most High will open your inner vision and illuminate your soul. And beware—and again, beware—of thinking that if a person truly invokes God, he will not find all that he needs therein. That is impossible. And know (may God be merciful to you and pleased) that were a *faqīr* from among our followers to ask me, "From where did you hear this saying—'That every single person has many needs, but in reality all of us need but one thing, which is the true remembrance of God, and if they remembered Him, there would be nothing they lacked regardless of whatever else they may have lost?'" —I would answer that about ten years after having reached puberty, I was pushed with a powerful push towards the Presence of my Lord when suddenly I was no longer I, but rather some other I after having been I, for God exchanged my impotence for His Power, my weakness for His Strength, my poverty for His Wealth, my ignorance for His Knowledge, such that after having been I, I was He.

And this is none other than what the Messenger of God ﷺ expressed in a *ḥadīth* that quotes the words of God ﷿: "And My servant does not cease to approach Me through supererogatory worship until I love him, and when I love him, I am he."[488] Part of what happened to me is that I was transformed into a vast ocean of knowledge such that had I been asked a thousand thousand questions, I would have been able to answer each one with an ample and concise response; I have become as a lamp, and if all other lamps were lit from my light, it would not be diminished in the least. And God is a warrant for what I say. *Peace.*

---

[487] Danner, p. 125, in the 28th Intimate Discourse

[488] This *ḥadīth qudsī* is narrated in its better known form, "and when I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees ... " but without the words "I am he," in Bukhārī, Aḥmad, Ḥakīm, and many other sources.

LETTER 272

Final words about the Remembrance

THE QUESTION OF the Remembrance is vast. See, if you wish, the explanation of God's words, *O you who believe! Remember God with frequent remembrance* [33:41] given by the people of commentary رضي الله عنهم and you will know how vast this question is.

We have said to you concerning the invocation of the Unique Name that what is correct is to invoke with serenity and dignity, with a sense of reverence and majesty, in a state of ritual purity, and relying only upon God. Do not invoke this Name rapidly—*Allāh*, *Allāh*, *Allāh*—but rather sustain its utterance as long as you have breath and visualize the five letters, concentrating on them with the eye of the heart—an *alif*, two *lāms*, an elided *alif*, and a *hā'*—and do not superimpose them onto anything.[489] Each time they fade, they must be brought back immediately—a thousand times, if necessary, and the invocation will bring you a great opening in the shortest time. We believe—and God knows best—that it should not take more than three weeks, and some say one week, and some say a night, and some say less than that. *And that is no great matter for God* [14:20, 35:17], on the condition that the invoker follow the method I have described.

We have said before in another letter, "It is certain that tranquility descends with the invocation of God. He who would know that with certainty need only make it a regular practice, done with stillness, reverence, respect, in a state of cleanliness as defined by the noble *sunna*, and with reliance upon God Most High." In fact, the spiritual traveler should be in this state for all his practices. Such is our view and it is one of the loftiest, but God knows best. *Peace.*

---

[489] See footnote 373.

BIOGRAPHICAL INDEX

The index below is of persons mentioned in the text, excluding Prophets, about whom we were able to find some background. The numbers refer to the number of the letter in the collection. "Introduction" refers to the Shaykh al-Darqāwī's introduction to the letters.

ᶜABD AL-WĀRITH (see AL-YĀLṢŪTĪ)

ABŪ BAKR AL-ṢIDDĪQ ibn Abī Quḥāfa al-Taymī (d. 13/634)—81, 252. He ؓ was among the greatest of the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ and the first of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs. Upon assuming his role as caliph, he is reported to have said to the people, "I have been made your leader, though I am not the best of you. If I do what is right, help me. If I err, set me straight." His reign lasted just over two years before he succumbed to an illness. His tomb is next to that of the Prophet and ᶜUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭab in Medina.

ABŪ JAHL, whose given name was ᶜAmr ibn Hisham (d. ca. 2 /624)—13, 66. One of the leaders of the Quraysh in fierce opposition to the Prophet ﷺ in Mecca. The name he is known by in Muslim history means "The father of ignorance."

ABŪ MADYAN, Shuᶜayb b. Ḥusayn (d. 594/1197)—5, 8,13, 17, 76, 81, 123, 172, 246, 249. He figures prominently in the spiritual lineage of the Shādhiliyya-Darqāwiyya. He was born near Seville in poverty and after some travel in search of knowledge in Andalusia, he travelled to Morocco and wound up first in Marrakesh and eventually in Fes where he became a student of Sīdī ᶜAlī Ḥirzihim (see below) in Sufism. Later he became a disciple of the near-legendary saint Abū Yaᶜzā (see below) and eventually a shaykh in his own right, teaching the way from Bijāya, where he spent the final years of his life.

ABŪ'L-MAWĀHIB, Abū Ḥāmid Abū ᶜAbd Allāh al-Tūnusī (d. c. 850/1446) —Introduction, 13, 36. An Egyptian Sufi of the Shādhilī lineage noted for his visions and states of intoxication. He is reputedly the author of *Qawānīn ḥikm al-ishrāqī fī qawā'id al-ṣūfiyya ᶜalā-l-iṭlāq*, a book presenting fundamental notions of Sufism in the form of maxims, translated into English as *Illumination in Islamic Mysticism* (see bibliography). His tomb is in Cairo.

ABŪ'L-RAWĀYIN, Abū ᶜAbdallāh Muḥammad al-Maḥjūb (d. 959/1551-2) —96. One of the ecstatic Sufis of Meknes, remembered for his charity, giving all his possessions away to the poor and indigent, and also for his intoxicated speech. It is said he would go up to people of importance and tell them, "Buy your authority from me!" as a way of asking them to give to the poor. If they complied, he would say, "Now you are safe!" and if not, he would say, "You are on your own!" He was one of the spiritual masters of ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān al-Majdhūb (see below).

ABŪ SAᶜĪD (see Ibn al-Aᶜrabī)

ABŪ SALHĀMA, Abū Saᶜīd ᶜUthman al-Miṣrī, known popularly in Morocco as

Mūlay Bouselham (d. c. 340/951)—78, 139, 172. An early wandering Sufi, originally from Egypt. His tomb is on the coast of Morocco between Kenitra and Larache.

ABŪ SHITĀ' (see Al-Shāwī).

ABŪ ṬĀLIB, ibn Abū Muṭṭalib (d. 619 CE)—13. He was the uncle of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ and the father of ᶜAlī, the fourth Caliph (see below). When Muḥammad's father died, he raised him like his own son and never abandoned him as long as he lived. There is some disagreement about whether he entered Islam or not.

ABŪ YAᶜZĀ Yallanūr (sometimes rendered Abū Yiᶜzzā Yalannūr) (d. 572/1177)—76, 123, 172, 252. Known in Morocco to this day as Moulay Bouᶜazza, he was the near-legendary illiterate Berber Sufi who was one of the teachers of Abū Madyan. It is said that he spent years of his youth wandering the mountainous regions of Morocco living off wild plants. His tomb is on the site of the zāwiya he built in the Middle Atlas Mountains near the town of Azrou.

ABŪ ZAYD, ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān b. Hibat Allāh al-Mazyātī (d. c. 607/1210)—172. A Sufi and ascetic who lived in an isolated region of the mountains of northern Morocco.

AL-ᶜALAMĪ, Abū ᶜAbdallāh Sīdī Muḥammad b. Mulāya al-Tuhāmī (d. 1127/1715) —235, A Sufi about whom it was said that he was never seen unless he was invoking God or asking forgiveness.

ᶜALĪ, Ibn Abū Ṭālib (d. 40/661)—Introduction, 81. He *karram allahuwajd* was among the greatest of the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ and later his son-in-law through his marriage to Fāṭima رضي الله عنها (see below). He was also the first male to accept Islam, the fourth Rightly Guided caliph, and (according to Shiite doctrine), the first Imam. ᶜAlī and Fāṭima became the model of austerity, piety, and chivalry *(al-futūwa)*.

ᶜALĪ, Sīdī—al-Jamal (see al-ᶜAmrānī)

AḤMAD IBN ḤANBAL (d. 241/855)—148 159. A great scholar, collector of *ḥadīth*, and founder of the Ḥanbalī school, one of the four main schools (*madhāhib*) of Sunni jurisprudence followed today in the Arabian peninsula and Gulf countries. He traveled extensively in search of *ḥadīth*, of which he is said to have committed over three hundred thousand to memory, these being the ones recorded in his monumental collection, al-Musnad. His tomb is in the city of his birth, Baghdad.

AḤMAD IBN YŪSUF al-Milyānī (d. 931/1524)—183, 185, 215, 218, 219, 227. A disciple of Aḥmad Zarrūq (see below). Shaykh al-Darqawi's home was near his tomb.

AL-AGHṢĀWĪ, Sīdī Muḥammad b. ᶜUmar al-Zarwālī (d. 1229/1813)—218. He was a *faqīh*, instructor at the Qarawiyyin Mosque, and one of Shaykh al-Darqāwī's teachers of Qur'ān. The Aghṣāwiyyīn originated in Ghazwā, the mountainous region south of Chefchaouen, and are also referred to as Ghazwāyiyyīn, depending upon how the Berber word is rendered.

ĀᶜISHA bint Abī Bakr (d. 58/678)—139. She was رضي الله عنها the third and most beloved wife of the Prophet ﷺ and it is in the place that was once her room that he was buried. Besides her status as the Prophet's wife, she is recognized as one of the greatest authorities in Islam and the primary narrator of scores of *hadīth*.

AL-ᶜAMRĀNĪ, ᶜAlī ibn ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad (d. 1193/1779)—Introduction, 1, 45, 48, 76, 81, 81, 96, 105, 123, 152, 155, 168, 172, 210, 237, 246, 263, 265, 269. Known as Sidi ᶜAlī al-Jamal ("The Camel") because of the incident described in the Shaykh's introduction. He was the spiritual master of Shaykh al-Darqāwī. Sīdī ᶜAlī left one written work behind, a collection of insights into the Way called *Naṣīḥat al-Murīd fī ṭarīq ahl al-sulūk wa-l-tajrīd* (see bibliography). Another Moroccan Sufi master, Sīdī ᶜAbd al-Wāḥid al-Debbāgh, said concerning him, "No one knows Sīdī ᶜAlī al-Jamal except the one who is Sīdī ᶜAlī al-Jamal!"

AL-ASWĀNĪ, Abū ᶜAbdallāh (d. 686/1287)—50. An Egyptian Sufi who lived in the town of Akhmīm, in the Aswān region of Egypt, about 475 km south of Cairo.

AL-AṢBAHĀNĪ, Abū Nuᶜaym (d. 430/1038)—50. Best known as the author of *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'* ("Ornament of the Saints"), a voluminous collection of biographies beginning with the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ, then the Successors (*al-tābiᶜūn*), and those who followed them, up the Abū Nuᶜaym's own time. His tomb is also near Isfahan.

AL-BENNĀNĪ, Sīdī Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan (d. 1194/1780)—173. *Faqīh* and imam at the shrine of Mūlay Idīs II in Fes for about 14 years, where he also taught Qur'anic commentary, the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī,* the *Alfiyya*, and other standard works His tomb is in Derb al-Ṭawīl in Fes.

AL-BAQQĀL, Muḥammad b. ᶜAli (d. 1093/1682) Sufi in the lineage of al-Ghazwānī in the *Ṭarīqat al-Jazuliyya*—154, 246.

AL-BAṢRĪ, al-Ḥasan, (d. 110/728-9)—81, 154. One of the Successors (*al-tābiᶜīn*) and also considered to be one of the earliest Sufis. He was born in Medina, the son of a slave who had been freed by Zayd ibn Thābit, one of the scribes of the Prophets. After taking part in the conquest of eastern Iran, he moved to Baṣra, where he spent the remainder of his life teaching to great multitudes. His tomb is found in that city.

AL-BASTĀMĪ, Abū Yazīd Tayfur, also called Bayazid, Bistāmī or Bustāmī (d. 208 /874)—16, 81, 123, 163. One of the great ascetic and ecstatic Sufis from the classical period. He was a disciple of Dhū'l-Nūn al-Miṣrī (see below),

AL-BĀZGHĀNĪ, Abū Muḥammad (d. c. 495/1100)—81. Shaᶜrānī in *Laṭā'if al-minan wa'l-akhlāq* mentions him as the shaykh who initiated Imam al-Ghazālī into Sufism.

AL-BUṢĪRĪ, (also pronounced al-Buṣayrī) Sharaf al-Dīn, (d. 693 /1294)—1,50, 57, 74, 79, 80, 96, 131, 146, 233, 252. He was an Egyptian Sufi of Berber origins who received the teachings of the Shādhiliyya Ṭarīqa at the hands of its first successor after Imam al-Shādhilī, Abū'l-ᶜAbbās al-Mursī (see below). Imam al-Buṣīrī is best remembered for his long poem in praise of the Prophet ﷺ entitled *al-Burda*.

AL-BŪZĪDĪ, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Slimānī al-Ghomārī (d. 1229/1813)—90. Sufi shaykh. He was born and raised in the village of Benslimān, in the Ghomāra region of Morocco near Tetouan. After some years of spiritual wandering around Morocco, he met and became of the disciple of Shaykh al-Darqāwī and was eventually put in direct charge of Aḥmad ibn ᶜAjība's (see below) training in the path.

AL-DĀRĀNĪ, Abū Sulaymān (d. 215/830) —96, 131, 243. One of the earliest Sufis. His origin was Dāriyya, a village near Damascus. He narrated *ḥadīth* from Sufyān al-Thawrī (see below). Among his sayings: "The best practice is to oppose the ego's desires."

AL-DHAHABĪ, Aḥmad al-Manṣūr (d. 1012/1603) —71. The Saᶜdī ruler of Morocco from 1578 to 1603 who came into power after the famous Battle of the Three Kings (1578), transformed the town of Marrakesh into a great city, was supportive to the Sufi fraternities, and negotiated trade agreements with Queen Elizabeth I.

DHŪ'L-NŪN al-Miṣrī, Thawbān (d. 245/860)—81, 121, 163. Born in upper Egypt, he was one of the most illustrious of the early Sufis and reputedly the first to systematize the *maqāmāt*, the stations of the spiritual path. His tomb is in Cairo.

AL-FĀSĪ, ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān Abū Zayd (972-1036/1564-1626)—155, 139. Scholar and Sufi. He was born in Qaṣr al-Kabīr in northern Morocco and studied in Fes with some of the greatest scholars of his day including Yaḥya Sirāj and Abū'l-ᶜAbbās al-Mansūr. He authored several useful works, among them marginal annotations (*ḥāshiyyāt*) to the ḥadıth collection of al-Bukhārī, the Qur'anic commentary of Jalāllayn, *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt*, and *al-Ḥizb al-Kabīr* of Imam al-Shādhilī.

AL-FĀSĪ, Muḥammad b. ᶜAbdallāh Maᶜan al-Andalūsī (d. 1062/1652)—25. He was son of the founder of the ᶜAbdallawī *zāwiya* in the Makhfiyya neighborhood of Fes. He was a disciple of both his father and Yūsuf Abī'l-Maḥāsin, and this latter's family he supported financially for many years. It is recorded that Sīdī Muḥammad himself did not believe the transmission of litanies from shaykh to disciple, although his name figures in the initiatatic lineage of the Darqāwiyya. His tomb is in Maṭraḥ al-Janna, outside Bāb Futūḥ in Fes.

AL-FĀSĪ AL-FIHRĪ, Abū Jīda bin Aḥmad bin al-Shaykh Muḥammad ᶜAbd al-Qādir (d. 1188/1766)—242. He was one of the gnostics and scholars of Fes. He is buried in the zāwiya of his grandfather in Qalqaliyīn.

FĀṬIMA AL-ZAHRĀ' bint Muḥammad (d. 11/632) —81, 256. She رضي الله عنها was the youngest daughter of the Prophet ﷺ Muhammad and Khadijah. She became the wife of ᶜAli b. Ṭālib and mother of al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. She died at a young age, probably in her early 20s, shortly after the death of her father ﷺ.

AL-GHAZĀLĪ, Abū Ḥamīd Muḥammad b. Muḥammad (d. 504/1111)—74, 81, 96, 104, 153, 252, 253. Sufi, scholar, prolific author and known as *Ḥujjat al-islām* ("The proof of Islam"). He was born and died in Ṭūs, in Khorasan. After an illustrious career as teacher and lecturer, he renounced his position at the age of around forty and took up the life of a wandering dervish. The fruits of both his scholarship and efforts in the spiritual path form the basis of his most famous work, *Iḥyā ᶜulūm al-dīn*, "The Revival of the Religious Sciences." His works are said to have influenced St. Thomas Aquinas and numerous other western philosophers.

AL-GHAZĀLĪ (unknown saint buried in Jarīdat al-Andalūs in Fes)—76, 145.

AL-ḤARRĀQ, Abū ᶜAbdallāh Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. ᶜAbd al-Wāḥid al-Mussawī (d. 1261/1845) —269. Sufi, scholar, and poet. He was born and grew up in Chefchaouen then studied in Fes with the greatest teachers of his day and gained a high standing as a scholar in his own right. He later became Shaykh al-Darqawi's representative in Tetouan and eventually a separate branch of the Darqāwiyya, the Ḥarrāqiyya, known its their use of musical instruments in sessions of invocation, formed around him.

AL-ḤASAN al-Bāṣrī (see al-Baṣrī)

ḤAMDŪSH, ᶜAlī ibn al- (d. 1135/1722)—66. He was known especially for his extreme and ecstatic states during sessions of invocation and at other times. The Ṭarīqa named after him, *al-Ḥamdushiyya* or *Ḥamādsha*, is still alive today in Morocco, largely in the domain of popular Sufism. Sīdī ᶜAlī is buried in Zerhūn, five or six kilometers from Meknes, and his tomb is a place of popular visitations, especially during the annual Mawlid celebrations.

AL-ḤAWĀRĪ, Abū'l-Ḥasan ibn Abī (d. 230/844)—96, 243. One of the earliest Sufis, among the ascetics of Damascus and a student of Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī (see above). Among his sayings, "No servant is tried by anything worse than heedlessness of God."

ḤIRZIHIM, SīdīᶜAlī, ibn (also spelled Ḥarazam) (d. 559/1163)—76, 172, 246. He was initially one of the foremost of the *ᶜulamā'* of Fes and among those asked by the Almoravid Sultan to judge the orthodoxy of al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyāᶜulūm al-dīn* when copies first began to appear in Morocco. After a lengthy study, he is reported to have agreed with other scholars that the book should be burnt. Following this judgment, he had a dream in which he reportedly saw al-Ghazālī and the Prophet ﷺ and the latter ordered that Sīdī ᶜAlī should receive eighty lashes. When he awoke in the morning, as the narrative goes, he found either the marks or the pain of those lashes on his back. This led to his renouncing his life as a jurist and setting out on the Sufi path. He numbers among the teachers of Abū Madyan al-Ghawth and a spring near his tomb outside Fes is well-known for its bottled water, drunk all over Morocco.

IBN ᶜABDALLĀH, al-ᶜArabī b. Aḥmad al-Maᶜn al-Andalūsī (d. 1166/1753)—Introduction, 2. Sīdī ᶜAlī al-Jamal's principle master in the Sufi path and successor to the well-known zāwiya al-ᶜAbdalāwiyya in Fes. Ibn ᶜAjība in his Fahrasa wrote that in Sīdī al-ᶜArabī "two oceans met," inasmuch as he received the Shādhiliyya way from his father and the Qādiriyya way from Sīdī Aḥmad al-Yamānī (see below).

IBN ADHAM, Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm (d. c. 161/777)—81. He is reputed to have started life as a member of royalty (according to some, a king) in Balkh, in present-day northwest Afghanistan. After a transformative spiritual experience, he renounced his former life and lived as a wandering ascetic. During his life he kept company with Sufyān al-Thawrī and Fuḍayl b. ᶜIyyād. His tomb is in the town of Jabala in Syria.

IBN AL-AᶜRĀBĪ, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ziyād b. Bishr b. Dirham al-ᶜAnzī, known as Abū Saᶜīd (d. c. 340/952)—Introduction, 119. Sufi, transmitter of *ḥadīth*, and linguist. Sulamī said, "In his time, he was the Shaykh of the Sacred Precinct (Mecca)." Originally from Basra, he was a companion of Junayd (see above) and spent a great deal of his life in Mecca where he died. He figures in the chains of *ḥadīth* transmission in the *Sunan* of Abū Dāwūd, Bayhaqī's *Shuᶜab al-īmān*, and others.

IBN ᶜARABĪ, Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Ḥātimī (d. 638/1240)—153, 163, 259. He is known to the Sufis as al-Shaykh al-Akbar, the greatest master. He was born in Murcia, to the east of Granada, and moved to Seville as a boy. During his younger years he also traveled in the Maghrib and met a number of Sufi shaykhs (including two women) which he recounted in a book entitled *Al-Riḥlat al-Qudsiyya,* (*The Sacred Journey*). When he was about 30, he embarked on more extensive travels that would take him more than once to Cairo, Jerusalem, Mecca, central Anatolia, and major cities in Iraq and Syria. During this period of time, he wrote extensively, his opus major being *Futuḥāt al-Makkiyya*. It was due to misunderstandings of the notion of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the Oneness of Being), a doctrine closely associated with him, that he has had many detractors, some of whom have even accused him of heresy.

IBN ᶜASKAR, Muḥammad b. ᶜAlī al-Ḥasanī al-ᶜAlamī (d. 986/1578) —96. Historian and Sufi, best-known for his work *Dawḥat al-Nāshir,* a hagiography of the shaykhs connected to the *Ṭarīqat al-Jazuliyya* in the tenth/sixteenth century in Morocco.

IBN ᶜAJĪBA, Abū'l-ᶜAbbās Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Mahdī al-Ḥasanī (d. 1224/1809) —3, 40, 81, 96. Sufi and scholar, he became a disciple of the *Ṭarīqa al-Darqāwiyya* relatively late in life under the tutelage of the Shaykh al-Darqāwī's *muqaddam*, Sīdī Muḥammad al-Būzīdī (see above). After a period of spiritual testing, he began to author many works on the Way, the most famous of which is his Qur'anic commentary, *al-Baḥr al-Madīd.*

IBN ᶜAṬĀ' ALLĀH, Tāj al-Dīn Abū'l-Faḍl al-Iskandarī (d. 708/1308)—Introduction,1, 4, 13, 15, 24, 26, 31, 34, 39, 50,57, 74, 81, 83, 85, 96, 105, 123, 133, 139, 140, 142, 143, 145, 147, 148, 157, 200, 243, 246, 248, 253, 257, 271. A Sufi and one of the greatest Mālikī scholars of his day in Egypt. He became the spiritual disciple of Abū'l-ᶜAbbās al-Mursī, the successor of Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, and eventually Shaykh of the *Ṭarīqa Shādhiliyya* in Egypt. He is the author of *Kitāb al-Ḥikam*, The Book of Aphorisms, a compendium of Sufi wisdom, which has been the object of numerous commentaries. Other of his main works include *Laṭā'if al-minan*, on the life of his shaykh, and *Tanwīr fī isqat al-tadbīr*, both of which have been translated in English (see bibliography).

IBN AL-BANNĀ', Abu'l-ᶜAbbās Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Tujībī al-Sarqusṭī (d. ca. 850/1446)—26, 39, 50, 233. A Moroccan Sufi and scholar who figures in the Shādhilī lineage and is known principally for his poem on the fundamentals of Sufism, *al-Mubāḥith al-aṣliyya*, upon which Sīdī Aḥmad ibn ᶜAjība (see above) wrote an esoteric commentary, *al-Futūḥāt al-ilāhiyya*. He should not be confused with the famous mathematician and astonomer by that name who is buried in the city of Marrakesh. The tomb of Ibn al-Bannā' al-Sarqusṭī is in Fes.

IBN AL-FĀRIḌ, ᶜUmar b. ᶜAlī (576-632/1181-1235)—Introduction, 81, 96, 146. The renowned Egyptian Sufi poet known as *sulṭān al-ᶜāshiqīn*, "The sultan of the lovers" of God. His father gained the name al-Fāriḍ as a religious judge who specialized in rulings in inheritance cases (*al-furūḍ*). ᶜUmar grew up in Cairo and studied traditional knowledge, then turned towards the Sufi path.

IBN MASHĪSH, ᶜAbd al-Salām (d. c. 565/1355)—41, 76, 81, 96, 123, 134, 145, 172. He was the near-legendary spiritual master of Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (see below). What is known of his teachings arises from the sayings recorded in the early books of the Shādhiliyya order, notably *Laṭā'if al-minan*. He is also considered the author of a famous prayer of blessing upon the Prophet although there is no direct evidence of this in those books. His tomb atop Jabal ᶜAlam in the Rif Mountains of northern Morocco is one of the most venerated shrines in the country.

IBN ABĪ AL-MANṢŪR, Ṣafī al-Dīn (d. 682/1283)—50. An Egyptian Sufi best known for his book *al-Risāla* (Treatise), a hagiography of the many shaykhs which the author actually met or knew of, especially in Egypt. See Gril in the bibliography.

IBN MAYMŪN, Abū'l-Ḥasan ᶜAlī al-Ḥasanī (d. 917/1511)—81, 96. Qaḍi and scholar originally from the Chefchaouen region of Morocco, he eventually travelled to the Egypt, made the Pilgrimage from there, then travelled on to Syria where he passed away.

IBN NŪḤ, ᶜAbd al-Ghaffār (d. 708/1308)—50. An Egyptian Sufi who founded a zāwiya in Qūṣ, in the Aswān region of Egypt, and was a disciple of ᶜAbd al-ᶜAzīz al-Manūfī (d. 703/1304) who was, in turn, a follower of Ibn ᶜArabī al-Ḥātimī (see above). The one written work attributed to Ibn Nūḥ, *Kitāb al-Waḥīd fī sulūk ahli al-tawḥīd* ("The unique exposition of the way of the people of unification") exists only in manuscript form to this day.

IBN RAYSŪN, Sīdī Muḥammad b. ᶜAlī (d. 1018/1609) —66. A scholar and Sufi, in the lineage of Mūlay ᶜAbd al-Salām ibn Mashīsh and the *shurafā'* of the region of Jabal al-ᶜAlam in the Rif Mountains.

IBN SHAYBĀN, Ibrāhīm al-Qirmīsīnī (d. 330/942)—17, 96. One of the early Khorasani Sufis. He was a companion of Sulamī and also a disciple for some time of Ibrāhīm al-Khawwāṣṣ.

IDRĪS, Ibn Idrīs, known in Morocco as *Mūlay Idrīs al-asghar* ("the younger") (d. 213/828) —158, 173, 216. The son of Idrīs ibn ᶜAbdallāh al-Kāmil, also called *Mūlay Idrīs al-akbar* ("the elder"), the spiritual founder of Morocco and great great grandson of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. The tomb of Idrīs II is one of the major shrines in Fes.

ᶜIZZ AL-DĪN ibn ᶜAbd al-Salām b. Abī al-Qāsim (d. 660/1261)—74, 81. He was one of the foremost scholars of his time in Shāfiᶜī *fiqh* and later met Imam al-Shādhilī from whom he received teachings in the Sufi path. He is mentioned a number of times in *Laṭā'if al-minan* where it is reported that Imam al-Shādhilī said of him, "Nowhere in the world is a gathering to study *fiqh* more splendid than the gathering of Shaykh ᶜIzz al-Dīn ibn ᶜAbd al-Salām."

AL-JAᶜĪDĪ, ᶜAbd al-Salām (d. 1198/1716)—213. A powerful and somewhat tyrannical Caid in Fes. Eventually the people of that city revolted against him and he had to escape with his life to Meknes, where he elicited the help of the Sultan.

AL-JILĀNĪ, ᶜAbd al-Qādir (d. 561/1166)—17. Renowned Sufi and teacher of the classical period and founder of the order which bears his name, al-Qādiriyya. He was born in northern Persia and studied Ḥanbalī jurisprudence in Baghdad.

AL-JUNAYD, Abu'l-Qāsim b. Muḥammad (d. 277/910)—Introduction, 5, 96, 104, 123, 125, 139, 242, 253. His family origins were Persian although he was born in Baghdad and is possibly the most famous of the Baghdad Sufis. He kept company with his uncle Sarī al-Saqaṭī, al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, and ᶜAlī al-Qaṣāb.

AL-KARKHĪ, Maᶜrūf (d. c. 815/200) — 81. He was one of the earliest of those to be called "Sufi," reportedly a convert to Islam from Christianity. He was born and died in Baghdad.

AL-KHAMMĀR, Abū al-Shitā' (see Al-Shāwī)

AL-KHARŪBĪ, Muḥammad b. ᶜAlī Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Ṭarābulsī (d. 963/1556)—74, 96. An important disciple of Aḥmad ZarrūAl-Kharūbī figures prominently in Shādhiliyya lineage in Morocco. He is author of several works including a Qur'anic commentary, *al-Ḥikam al-Kubrā*, that was never published, a commentary on the *Ṣalāt al-Mashīshiyya*, and a commentary on Zarrūq's work, *ᶜUyūb al-nafs*. His tomb is in Algeria.

AL-KHAṢĀṢĪ, Qāsim (1083/1673)—7, 81, 143. Born in Khaṣāṣa, a village that once existed on the Mediterranean coast of Morocco near Melilla. Sīdī Qāsim was a disciple of Sīdī Aḥmad b. ᶜAbdallāh Maᶜn and an important figure in the spiritual line (silsila) of the *Ṭarīqat al-Darqāwiyya*. He is buried outside Bāb Futūḥ in Fes.

AL-KHUMSĪ, Abū'l-ᶜAbbās Aḥmad al-Ḥaddād (d. 962/1555)—96. Sufi, a disciple of ᶜAbdallāh al-Ghazwānī, and therefore part of the Jazuliyya order. He was and also the imam of the Shurafā' mosque in Banū Falwāṭ. As his name *al-ḥaddād* indicates, he was a blacksmith by trade.

AL-KIRMĀNĪ, Shams al-Dīn (d. 786/1384)—Introduction. A Persian scholar of ḥadīth who is best-known for his commentary on the Bukhāri collection entitled *al-Kawākib al-darārī fī sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī.*

AL-LAJJĀ'Ī, Sīdī Muḥammad b. ᶜAlī (d. 1230/1815)—124, 210, 246. He was a *faqīh,* a teacher of the seven main modes of Qur'anic recitation, and the author of some works in this subject.

AL-MAᶜĀFĪRĪ (see QĀḌĪ)

AL-MAJDHŪB, ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān b. ᶜIyyād b. Yaᶜqūb b. Salāma al-Ṣinhājī (d. 976/1568)—44, 81, 96, 98, 116, 133, 155, 229. He was born in Azemmour on the Atlantic coast of Morocco during the early years of the Saᶜdī dynasty but travelled to Meknes where he lived most of his life and is buried. He is known throughout Morocco as the author of a small book of poetry written in Moroccan Arabic and containing popular wisdom, an attribution which may or may not be correct. His lines of mystical poetry, however, are quoted extensively both in the letters of the Shaykh al-Darqāwī and by Ibn ᶜAjība.

AL-MAKŪDĪ, Muḥammad b. ᶜAbdallāh (d. 1247/1799)—90, 227. Among the Shaykh al-Darqāwī's better-known disciples, he authored a number of works on Sufism including a commentary on the verses of Abū Madyan (see above) and a refutation of criticisms of Sufism by the ᶜ*ulamā'* of Tetouan who imprisoned for a short time some members of the Darqāwī order, including Aḥmad ibn ᶜAjība.

MĀLIK, ibn Anas al-Aṣbaḥī (d. 179/795)—148, 159. The founder of one of the four main schools (*madhāhib*) of Islamic law in Sunni Islam. Born into a family of *ḥadīth* narrators, he studied the recitation of the Qur'ān with Nāfiᶜ and heard *ḥadīth* from al-Ẓuhrī and Ibn al-Munkadir. His book, *al-Muwaṭṭa',* is the earliest surviving work of Muslim law, and places great emphasis on the actual practice of Islam in Medina in Imam Mālik's time.

MAYMŪN, Abū'l-Ḥasan ᶜAlī (d. 917/1511)— 81, 96. A scholar and Sufi. He was born in the Ghomāra region and was appointed Qadī of Chefchaouen. In his later life he traveled east and eventually died in Lebanon. His tomb is said to lie on a hill near Beirut.

MUḤAMMAD b. ᶜAbdallāh b. Ismāᶜīl al-Ḥasanī al-ᶜAlawī, also known in Morocco as Muḥammad III (d. c. 1204/1790)—25, 81, 172, 175, 182, 210, 213, 215, 235, 246. He was the 21stᶜAlawī ruler, reigning from 1757 to 1790. He did much to reform the governance of the land, built the city of Essaouira, brought the Barbary pirates under control, and established the earliest peace treaty of any nation with the United States, shortly after its independence.

AL-MURSĪ, Aḥmad b. ᶜUmar al-Anṣārī Abu'l-ᶜAbbās (d. 686/1286)—Introduction, 13, 16, 50, 78, 81, 266. Sufi, Mālikī scholar and successor of Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī as the shaykh of the Shādhiliyya order. As his name indicates, he was born in Murcia, in Andalusia, and then travelled to Alexandria where he became a disciple of al-Shādhilī. Most of what is known concerning his teachings comes from *Laṭā'if al-minan* by Ibn ᶜAṭā Allāh, his student and successor.

AL-OUAZZĀNI, ᶜAbdallāh al-Sharīf (See al-Wazzānī).

QĀḌĪ ABŪ BAKR, Muḥammad b. ᶜAbd Allāh b. al-ᶜArabı al-Maᶜāfirī (543/1148) —76, 172. 246. Qur'ān exegete, transmitter of *ḥadīth*, and one of the greatest of the Mālikī scholars of Andalusia. He was born in Seville and while still young traveled to the east with his father where he met and studied with the scholars of the day including al-Ghazālī, who was still teaching at the Madrasa Niẓamiyya in Baghdad. After his return to Seville, Ibn al-ᶜArabī (whose name can be distinguished from the famous Sufi, Ibn ᶜArabī by the presence of the article *al-*) authored numerous works, among which is his *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, a Qur'anic commentary focusing on the rules which can be derived from the verses, as well as commentaries on *al-Muwaṭṭa'*, and on al-Tirmidhī's *Sunan*. He died near Fes returning from an extended stay in Marrakesh where he had gone with a delegation from Seville to pledge fealty to the Almohad leader Ibn Tumert.

AL-QINĀ'Ī, ᶜAbd al-Raḥīm (d. 592/1196)—50. He was born in Sebta (Ceuta) in northern Morocco and is said to have been a disciple of both Abū Yaᶜzā and Abū Madyan. Later in life, he travelled to Mecca where he spent seven years, after which he traveled to Qinā, or Qena, a town in Upper Egypt, where he established an important zāwiya which remains to this day. He was succeeded by his student

Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, author of *Durrat al-Asrār*, one of the principal sources on the early Shādhiliyya.

AL-QUSHAYRĪ, ᶜAbd al-Karīm b. Hawāzin b. ᶜAbd al-Mālik b. Ṭalḥa, al-Nisapūrī (d. 465/1072)—163, 271. Sufi, scholar, Qur'ān exegete, known as the Master of Khorasan of his age. Ascetic and learned in all the religious sciences, he lived his whole life in Nishapur and died there. His best known works are his treatise on Sufism, *al-Risāla*, which has been published many times in Arabic, and his Qur'anic commentary, *Laṭā'if al-ishāra.*

AL-QŪṢĪ, ᶜAbd al-Ghaffār, known as Ibn Nūḥ (d. 708/1308)—50. An Egyptian Sufi, poet, and author of a mystical treatise entitled *al-Waḥīd fī sulūk al-Tawḥīd.*

AL-RIFĀᶜĪ, Abū'l-ᶜAbbās Aḥmad b. Abī al-Ḥasan ᶜAlī (d. 578/1182)—50. He was the founder of the al-Rifāᶜi Sufi order. He is buried near his birthplace in Baṣra, Iraq.

AL-SĀḤILĪ, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Anṣārī (d. 754/1353)—75. Sufi and scholar, born in Andalusia in the coastal town of Malaga where he eventually became the Friday preacher of the city's largest mosque. He travelled both to Morocco and the east and eventually returned to Malaga where he died. He is the author of a number of treatises including *Bughyatu al-sālik fī ashrafi al-masālik* and *al-Nafḥa al-Qudsiyya.*

SAHL ibn ᶜAbd Allāh (see al-Tustarī)

AL-ṢAQALLĪ, Aḥmad ibn Sīdī Muḥammad (d. 1177/1763)—225. Sufi Shaykh and founder of the *zāwiya* in Fes which continues to bear his name to this day. On his return from the Pilgrimage, Sīdī Aḥmad came in contact with the teachings of the Turkish Sufi order, al-Khalwatiyya, and brought these back to Morocco to form a distinct branch of the Shādhiliyya.

AL-SHĀDHILĪ, ᶜAlī b. ᶜAbd Allāh Abu'l-Ḥasan (591-656/1195-1258)— Introduction, 14, 39, 74, 81, 82, 96, 104, 153, 178, 243, 249, 253, 265. Founder of the Sufi order which bears his name. He was born in the Ghomāra region of Morocco near Chefchaouen and studied in Fes. After a discipleship with Mūlay ᶜAbd al-Salām ibn Mashīsh (see above) on Jabal ᶜAlam in the Rif Mountains, he took his spiritual teachings first to Tunisia and then Egypt, where he spent the rest of his life. He died en route to one of the several pilgrimages he made during his life and was buried near the old pilgrims' route near the Red Sea.

AL-SHĀFIᶜĪ, Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Qurashī (d. 204/820)—148, 159. Founder of one of the four main schools (*madhāhib*) of Sunni jurisprudence. He was born in Gaza around the year 150 (ca. 767), the same year in which Imam Abū Ḥanīfa died. At the age of two, he was taken by his widowed mother to Mecca where he spent most of his younger years. It is said that he had memorized the Qur'ān by the age of seven and was proficient in the varieties of its recitation and its commentary by the age of thirteen. By around the age of twenty he was living in Medina where he had became the student of Mālik b. Anas, many of whose opinions in *fiqh* he would later adopt. Much of his life after this was spent in traveling—to Yemen, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Persia—ever in search of knowledge. He died in Cairo where his tomb is a highly venerated.

AL-SHARĪSHĪ, Abū'-ᶜAbbās Taj al-Dīn al-Slawī, (d. 641/1243)—125. Sufi, Mālikī *faqīh*, scholar of logic and the sources of *fiqh*. He was born in Sale near Rabat, and grew up in Marrakesh. There he studied as well as in Fes and in Andalusia ("Sharīsh" is present day Jerez, about 40 km northwest from the southern coastal town of Cadiz). He is famous for the Qaṣīda in Rā' he wrote concerning Sufism called *Anwār al-sarā'ir wa sarā'ir al-anwar* (The Lights of Mysteries and the Mysteries of Lights).

AL-SHARQĀWĪ , al-Maᶜṭī b. Muḥammad al-Ṣāliḥ al-ᶜAmrāwī (d. 1190 /1766)—102. Mālikī faqīh and Sufi. He is buried in the zāwiya of Abū Jaᶜd (Boudjad).

AL-SHĀṬIBĪ, Abu al-Qāsim b. Masᶜūd (d. 1002/1593)—154. He was the Qadi of Marrakesh during the reign of Abū'l-ᶜAbbās al-Manṣūr.

Al-SHĀWĪ, Sīdī Muḥammad b. Mūsā (d. 997/1588)—Introduction, 30, 71, 235. He is known as Abū al-Shitā', or popularly as Mūlay Bū'shtā al-Khammār. He was a disciple in Sufism of ᶜAbdallāh al-Ghazwānī, the second successor to Shaykh Sulayman al-Jazūlī, founder of the *Ṭarīqa Jazuliyya* and famed author of *al-Dalā'il al-Khayrāt*. He is said to have received his nickname, literally, "father of the rain," because of his having had his prayer for rain in the Shāwī region during a time of drought answered. The second nickname, "al-khammār," which some people have taken to mean "someone who sells wine," actually relates to the Moroccan usage of the verb *khammara* to mean "soaking something thoroughly," and so to his nickname "father of rain." Mūlay Bū'shtā's *zāwiya* and final resting place is mid-way between Chefchaouen and Fes in the north of Morocco.

AL-SHUSHTARĪ, Abu'l-Ḥasan (d. 668/1269)—Introduction, 69, 81, 121, 178. Ecstatic Sufi poet. He was born in Granada (according to some into royal lineage). He eventually came under the influence of the esoteric doctrines of Ibn Sabᶜīn and taught these in Meknes. Towards the end of his life, he travelled to Egypt and died there. His tomb is in Damietta (near Alexandria), Egypt.

AL-SHUṬAYBĪ, Abū ᶜAbdallāh Muḥammad b. ᶜAlī, known as al-Ḥājj al-Shaṭībī, (d. 936/1529) —222. Born in Tāzghadra, a village in the region of Banū Zarwāl, of an Andalusian family who had migrated to the north of Morocco from the area of Granada during Merinid times. After studying the traditional sciences, he took the Sufi path from Sīdī Aḥmad b. Yuṣūf al-Milyānī (d. 931/1524), a disciple of Aḥmad Zarrūq (see below) and dedicated himself to a life of worship and renunciation. He left a few written works including a Qur'anic commentary, a commentary on certain aphorisms of the *Ḥikam* of Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh, a commentary on *Mubāḥīth al-aṣliyya of Ibn al-Bannā'*, and also on *Manāzil al-sā'irīn* by ᶜAbdallāh al-Anṣārī. His tomb is in the village where he was born

AL-SUYŪṬĪ, Jalāl al-Dīn (d. 910/1505)—50. An Egyptian scholar and Sufi versed in all the traditional religious sciences about which he is said to have written more than six hundred works. He is perhaps best known as one of the two authors (the "two Jalāls") of the famous Qur'anic commentary known as *Tafsīr al-Jalalayn*. His tomb is in Cairo.

AL-ṬANJĪ, Abū'l-ᶜAbbās (d. 612/1215)—50. He was known as *al-Ḥarmal*, after a variety of finch native to Morocco and known for its song and many colors. He was called by this name presumably because of the many types of traditional knowledge he had mastered. Originally from Tangiers, Abū'l-ᶜAbbās spent a certain amount of time in Marrakesh and then headed east, both to seek knowledge and to accomplish the Pilgrimage.

AL-TĀWUDĪ, Muḥammad b. al-Ṭālib b. ᶜAlī b. Sūdah al-Fāsī (d. 1209/1795)—76, 172. 246. He was a Mālikī scholar and teacher, one of the leading masters of Fes, who became widely known after his journey to Egypt and the Hijāz. Among his works are commentaries on Bukhārī, Muslim, and Abū Dāwūd, and a commentary on Nawawī's collection of forty *ḥadīth*. He also wrote two biographical collections, *al-Fahrasat al-ṣughrā*, on the lives of his own teachers, and *al-Fahrasat al-kubrā*, on students and others.

AL-TĀZĪ, Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad (d. 866/1461)—172. One of the greatest masters of the Way in North Africa of his day and a prolific poet as well. He is buried in the *zāwiya* that bears his name in the Algerian city of Oran.

AL-THAWRĪ, Sufyān b. Saᶜīd (d. 161/778)—81. An early saintly scholar often cited as a model of scruples and renunciation.

AL-TŪNUSĪ. (see Abū al-Mawāhib)

AL-TUSTARĪ , Sahl b. ᶜAbd Allāh (283/896)—36, 236, 268. One of the early Sufis. He was born in Tustar, in Khorasan. For a time, he was one of al-Ḥallāj's teachers and this latter accompanied him to Baṣra where he spent most of his life. Al-Tustarī's doctrine, however, was probably better represented by his student Ibn Sālim (d. 296/909) founder of the Sālimiyya school to which Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, the author of *Qūt al-Qulūb*, belonged.

ᶜUMAR IBN AL-KHAṬṬĀB (23/644)—81, 158. The second of the Rightly Guided Caliphs. At first an enemy of the Prophet's mission, he became one of its staunchest defenders. His conversion is said to have taken place after his own sister had embraced the new religion. After skillfully leading the community for ten years of rapid expansion, ᶜUmar ؓ was slain by a Persian slave. His grave is next to the Prophet's ﷺ and Abū Bakr al-Ṣiqqīq ؓ in Medina.

ᶜUMAR IBN ᶜABD AL-ᶜAZĪZ, b. Marwān (r. 101/720)—242. Sometimes called the fifth rightly-guided Caliph for his piety and virtue. A large body of sermons and anecdotes linked to him have found its way into religious literature.

ᶜUTHMĀN IBN ᶜAFFĀN, b. Abī al-ᶜAbbās b. Umayya (35/56)—81, 172. He ؓ was the third of the Rightly Guided Caliphs. He had been a wealthy merchant who became a Muslim before the Emigration. He eventually became known as "*Dhū'l-Nūrayn*"—"the man of the two lights"—because he married two of the prophet's daughters: first Ruqayya, and then, after her death, Umm Kulthūm. During the later years of his caliphate he was accused of nepotism, a charge which led to his being slain by a group of dissidents from Egypt.

WARSH, Abū Saᶜīd ᶜUthmān b. Saᶜīd, known as—(d. 197/813)—20, 215, 235, 266. He was the Qur'anic reciter after whom the Warsh recitation is named. Originally from Egypt, he travelled to Medina and became the student of the great Shaykh, Imam Nāfiᶜ, who gave him the name "*warsh*" (a species of very white birds of the pigeon family) because of how white Abū Saᶜīd was. Warsh is the predominant recitation in Morocco and other places in North Africa and is linked to the Mālikī rite by the fact that both Imam Mālik and Imam Warsh were students of Imam Nāfiᶜ in Medina.

AL-WĀSIṬĪ , Muḥammad b. Mūsā (d. 331/942)—139. One of the greatest of the early Sufis, and foremost of the followers of al-Junayd. He was born in Farghana (in present-day Turkistan) and journeyed to Khorasan where he spent the remainder of his life. Among his sayings: "We are tried by living in an age in which there are neither the manners (*adab*) of Islam, nor the virtues of the Jāhiliyya, nor the dreams of the chivalrous."

AL-WAZZĀNĪ, ᶜAbdallāh b. al-Ṭayyib al-Sharīf (d. 1071/1660)—159

AL-YĀLṢŪTĪ, ᶜAbd al-Wārith (d. 969/1562)—96. Sufi in northern Morocco, disciple for a time of al-Ghazwānī.

AL-YAMĀNI, Abū'l-ᶜAbbās Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Idrīs (d. 506/1113)—81, 172, 246. He was born in the east and was said to be related to ᶜAbd al-Qadir al-Jilānī. He travelled to Morocco, bringing with him the Qādiriyya way which he taught for the last thirty years of his life to many in Fes, including Sīdī al-ᶜArabī b. ᶜAbdallāh, the master of the master of the Shaykh al-Darqāwī. His tomb is outside Bāb al-Futūḥ in Fes.

AL-YŪSĪ, Abū ᶜAlī al- Ḥasan b. Masᶜūd (d. 1102/1691) also known as Sīdī Laḥsen Lyusi—81. A scholar and Sufi, disciple of the *Ṭarīqa Naṣiriyya,* and a prolific writer, whose rural Berber origins sometimes put him at odds with the *ᶜulamā'* of Fes at the time. He figures largely in the Clifford Geertz well-known anthropological study, *Islam Observed.*

ZARRŪQ, Aḥmad b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ᶜĪsā' al-Barnūsī Abū'l-ᶜAbbās (846-899/1442-1493)—96, 97, 131, 254. Scholar, transmitter of *ḥadīth*, and Sufi. He was called *zarrūq* because of his blue *(zarq)* eyes. A Berber born in Morocco, Zarrūq journeyed east as a young man, and after studying in Egypt and Medina, returned to Morocco to become one of the best-known shaykhs of the Shādhiliyya during the Merinid period. He was a prolific writer, leaving among other works, a commentary on the *Ḥikam* of Ibn ᶜAṭā'Allāh, and *The Principles of Sufism* (*Qawā'id al-taṣawwuf*). Although he spent several years spreading the teachings of the Shādhiliyya in Fes, in 886/1481, he settled in Masurata, near present-day Tripoli, where he spent the last twelve years of his life and where he is buried.

AL-ZARWĀLĪ, Sīdī Muḥammad (see AL-AGHṢĀWĪ).

AL-ZAYYĀTĪ, Abū Ḥafṣ ᶜUmar (d. 955/1548) —154. He was a student of al-Ghazwānī, the second successor to Shaykh al-Jazūlī. His tomb in his *zāwiya* in Ghomāra is a place of visit to this day.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works in Arabic

Darqāwī, Mulay al-ᶜArabīal-Ḥasanī,al-. *Majmūᶜa rasā'il.* Ed. Muḥammad Bassām Bārūd. Abu Dhabi: Cultural Foundation Publications, 1999.

Darqāwī, Mulay al-ᶜArabī, al-. *Majmūᶜa rasā'il Abū ᶜAbd Allāh Muḥammad al-ᶜArabī al-Darqāwī al-Ḥasanī fī al-taṣawwūf wa ādabihi* (off-set printing of original 1336/1917 lithograph). Dār al-Bayḍa: Dār al-Ṭubāᶜa al-ḥadītha.

Darqāwī, Mulay al-ᶜArabī, al-.*Bashūr al-hidāya fī madhhab al-ṣufiyya al-maᶜrūf bi Rasā'il Mālāya al-ᶜArabī al-Darqāwī.* Dār al-Bayḍa: Dār al-Rashād al-Jadīda, 2004.

Fāsī, Muḥammad al-Mahdī al-. *Mumtiᶜu al-asmāᶜ fī al-Jazūlī al-Tubāᶜ wa lā lahumā min al-itibā.* Dār al-Bayḍa: Maṭbaᶜat al-Najāḥ al-Jadīda, 1994.

Fāsī, Abū Ḥamid Muḥammad al-ᶜArabī b. Yūsuf al-. Mir'āt al-Maḥāsin min akhbar shaykh Abī'l-Maḥāsin. Dār al-Bayḍa: Maṭbaᶜat al-Najāḥ al-Jadīda, 2003.

Ghazālī, Abū Ḥamīd Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad, al-. *Iḥyā' ᶜulūm al-dīn.* Jeddah: Dar al-Minhaj, 1432/2011.

Ibn ᶜAbbād, AbūᶜAbd Allāh Maḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Rundī.*Gayth al-mawāhib al-ᶜaliyya fī sharḥ al-ḥikam al-ᶜaṭā'iyya.* Ed. ᶜAbd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd. Cairo: Dār al-Maᶜārif, 1993.

———. *Rasā'il al-Kubrā.* Ed. Kenneth Honerkamp. Beirut: Dār al-Machreq, 2005.

Ibn ᶜAjība, Aḥmad. *Al-Baḥr al-Madīd fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Majīd.* Cairo: Ḥassan ᶜAbbās Zakkī, 1999-2001.

———. *Futūḥāt al-ilāhiyya fī sharḥ mabāḥith al-aṣliyya.*Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ᶜIlmiyyah, 2000.

———. *Kitāb sharḥ ṣalāt al-quṭb ibn Mashīsh.* Ed. ᶜAbd al-Salām al-ᶜUmrānī. Dār al-Bayḍa: Dār al-Rashād, 1999.

Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh, Abū al-Faḍl Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad. Kitāb al-ḥikam, (lithograph), Morocco, undated.

———. *Laṭā'if al-minan.* Cairo: Dār al-Maᶜārif, 1992.

Ibn al-Fārid, ᶜUmar. *Diwān.* Cairo: Dar al-Qāhira, 1951.

Iṣfahānī, Abū Nuᶜaym, al-. *Ḥilyat al-awliyā' wa ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā'*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ᶜIlmiyyah, 1997.

Kansūs, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad, al-. *Al-Jaysh al-aramram al-khumāsī fī dawlat awlād Mawlāna ᶜAlī al-Sijilmāssī.* Marrakesh: Imprimerie el-Wataniya, 1994.

Marīr, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-. *Al-naᶜīm al-muqīm fī dhikra madāris al-ᶜilm wa majālis al-taᶜlīm.* Maṭbaᶜa al-khalīj al-ᶜarabī, 2003.

El Mansour, *Al-Maghrib qabla'-l-istiᶜmār.* Dār al-Bayḍa: *Al-Markaz al-thaqāfī al-ᶜarabī,* 2006.

Muᶜaskarī, Muḥammad Būziyyān b. Aḥmad al-.*Kanz al-asrār fī manāqib Mawlay al-ᶜArabī al-Darqāwi wa baᶜḍa aṣḥābihi.* Manuscript d. 2339, National Library, Rabat.

Makūdī, Muhammad b. ᶜAbdallāh. *Sulūk al-Ṭarīqati al-Darqāwiyya.* Casablanca: Dar al-Rachad, 2007.

Naṣirī, Abū al-ᶜAbbās b. Khālid. *Kitāb al-istiqṣā li ahkbār duwali al-maghrib al-aqṣā.* Casablanca: Dār al-kutub, 1997.

Qushayrī, Abū'l-Qasim, *al-Risālat al-qushayriyya*, Cairo: Dār al-Maᶜārif, 1995.

Talīdī, ᶜAbdallāh b. ᶜAbd al-Qādir al-. *Al-Muṭrib bi mashāhir awliyā'i al-maghrib.* Rabat: Dar al-Amān, 2003.

Temsimānī, Muḥammad al-. *al-Īmām Sīdī Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Būzīdī: Tarjamatuhu wa baᶜḍa āthārihi.* Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ᶜIlmiyyah, 2010.

Temsimānī, Muḥammad al-. *al-Īmām Mawlāya al-ᶜArabī al-Darqāwī.* Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ᶜIlmiyyah, 2007.

Tirmidhī, Muḥammad b. ᶜAlī b. Al-Ḥusayn AbūᶜAbd Allāh, al-.*Nawādir al-uṣūl fī aḥādīthal-Rasūl.* Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1992.

Al-Sāḥilī, Abū ᶜAbdallāh Muḥammad bin Aḥmad al-Anṣārī. *Bughīyat al-Sālik fī ashrafi al-masālik.* Rabat: Publication of the Ministry of Habous and Islamic Affairs, 2003.

Shushtarī, ᶜAli Abī al-Ḥasan. *Diwān.* Alexandria: Dār al-Maᶜārif, 1960.

Works in English and French

Buṣīrī, Imam Sharaf ad-Din al-. *The Burda.* Translation and transliteration by Aziza Spiker, Guidance Media, U.K., 2012.

Cornell, Vincent. *The Way of Abū Madyan.* Birmingham: Islamic Text Society, 1996.

Darqāwī, Mulay al-'Arabī. *Lettres sur la Voie spirituelle (du) Shaykh al- ᶜArabī, al-Darqāwī.* Translated into French by M. Chabry. Milan: Arché, 2003.

Darqāwī, Mulay al-'Arabī. *Letters of a Sufi Master.*(Excerpts of the letters translated into French by Titus Burckhardt and into English by Martin Lings and Nancy Pearson). Middlesex: Perennial Books, 1969.

Darqāwī, Mulay al-'Arabī. *The Darqawi Way.* (Translation of the letters into English by ᶜAisha ᶜAbdar-Rahman at-Tajumana). Diwan Press, Norwich, 1979.

Fawzi, Abdul Razak, "Printing as an agent for change in Morocco, 1864-1912," in *The Book in Africa: Critical Debates*, edited by Davis, Caroline, and Johnson, David. United Kingdom: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2015.

Geertz, Clifford, *Islam Observed.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971.

Halman, Hugh Talat, *Where The Two Seas Meet: The Qur'ānic Story of al-Khiḍr and Moses in Sufi Commentaries.* Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2013.

Heck, Paul L. "*An Early Response to Wahhabism from Morocco: The Politics of Intercession.*"Studia Islamica. Vol. 107, No. 2 (2012), pp. 235-254.

Ibn ᶜAjība, Aḥmad.(Fahrasa) *The Autobiography of a Moroccan Soufi*. Translated from the Arabic by Jean-Louis Michon and from the French by David Steight. Louisville: Fons Vitae, 1999.

———. *Two Sufi Commentairies*. Translated from the Arabic by Arjan Post and Michael Abdurrahman Fitzgerald. Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2015.

———. *The Immense Ocean*—Al-baḥr al-madīd: A thirteen/eighteen Qur'anic commentary on the chapters of The All- Merciful, The Event, and Iron. Trans. by Mohamed Fouad Aresmouk and Michael Abdurrahman Fitzgerald. Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2009.

———. *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism* (*Miᶜrāj al-tashawwuf ilā ḥaqā'iq al-taṣawwuf*), translated by Mohamed Fouad Aresmouk and Michael Abdurrahman, Fons Vitae, Louisville, 2011.

Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh, Abū al-Faḍl Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad.*The Book of Wisdom.* (*Kitāb al-Ḥikam*, translated into English by Victor Danner). New York: Classics of Western Spirituality,1978.

Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh, Abū al-Faḍl Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad (*Laṭā'if al-minan fi Manaqib Abi'l-Abbas al-Mursi waShaykhihi Abi'l-Hasan.* Translation into English by Nancy Roberts of *Laṭā'if al-minan* (see Ibn ᶜAṭāAllāh in Arabic works above). Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2005.

Johnson, Marion. "The Nineteenth-Century Gold 'Mithqal' in West and North Africa." *The Journal of African History,* Vol. 9, No. 4, 1968.

Al-Lamaṭī, Aḥmad b. al-Mubārak. *Pure Gold from the Words of Sayyidīᶜ Abd al-ᶜAzīz al-Dabbāgh.*Translation of *Kitāb al-Ibrīz* by John O'Kane and Bernd Radtke. Leiden: Brill, 2007.

El-Mansour, Mohamed. *Morocco in the Reign of Mawlay Sulayman.* Cambridgeshire: Middle and Northeaster Studies Press, 1990.

Michon, Jean-Louis. *Le Soufi Marocain Aḥmad ibn ᶜAjība et son Miᶜrāj. Glossaire de la mystique musulmane.* Paris :Vrin, 1973.

——— *The Autobiography (Fahrasa) of a Moroccan Soufi: Ahmad ibn ᶜAjiba.* Translated by Michael Streight. Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 1999.

Mouline, Nabil. *The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein (editor). *The Study Qur'an.* New York: Harper Collins, 2015.

Qushayri, Abu'l-Qasim. *Al-Qushayri's Epistle on Sufism.* (English translation of *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya fi ᶜilm al-taṣawwuf* by Alexander D. Knysh). Reading: Garnet, 2007.

GENERAL INDEX

Topics, names of Prophets ﷷ, places, and books
Numbers refer to the letters in which they are mentioned
Numbers in bold are letters in which the item appears in the title of the letter
The word "introduction" refers to the Shaykh's introduction to the letters

A, ᶜA

abandoning or avoiding what does not concern us (*tarku mā lā yaᶜnī*), 1, 20, 37, 96, 99, 104, 149, 152, 169, 262, 270
ablution (*al-wuḍu'*), 1, 93, 242, 245, 249, 250
Abraham, the Prophet ﷷ, 58, 87, 265
ādāb (virtuous comportment, right conduct), 158, 160, 247
adversary
  inner ___, introduction , 118, 128, 134
  ___ of the devil or the ego, 16
afflictions (*see* trials)
Akhmīm (Egypt), 50
Alexandria, 133
ᶜ*amal* (pl. *a*ᶜ*māl*) (deeds, work, or practices), introduction, **11**, 13, 16, 17, 20, 37, **40**, **57**, **72**, 75, 81, 94, 101, 115, 138, 140, 143, 145, **152**, 233, 243, 246, 247, **252**, 256
Andalusia, 137
angel, angels
  ᶜAzrā'īl, ___ of death, 182
  two questioning _____ , 261
  vision of ___, 50
  ___ who glorifies God, 81
ᶜ*ārif* , pl. ᶜ*ārifūn* (gnostic, one who knows God), 6, 33, 74, 75, 93, 96, 98, 172, 253
arrival (*wuṣūl*), 82 141, 147
attraction, divine (*jadhb*), 6, 41, 61, 102, 139, 246
Attributes and Essences of God, **75**, 121

B

bāb (city gate,), ___ al-Futūḥ (Fes), 246; ___ al-Jīsa (Fes), 269; ___ al-Maḥrūq (Fes) 199, 210.
banī ("the children of," used in Morocco to refer to tribes along with the Berber equivalent, "Ait"), ___Ahmad, 184, 190, 215; ___ ᶜAmrān, introduction, ___; Ḥassān, introduction; ___Yafrīḥ, 145; ___Musāfir, 242; ___ Zarwāl, introduction, 13, 14, 26, 69, 96, 187, 191, 194, 195, 199, 219, 242, 246;
baraka (blessing power), introduction, 17, 96, 126, 159, 215, 256, 262
basṭ (expansion, expansiveness), 50, 87, 136, 183, 193

Basṭām (a town of Khorasan, now northeast Iran), 163
beauty of character, virtue (*ḥusnu 'l-khuluq*), 2, 79, 167, 249
beauty, **33**, 35, 36, **45**, 52, 75, **91**, 104, **121**, 122, 178, 250, 269 ; Names of ____ 37
begging, **5**, 39, 70, 119, 145, **146**, **208**
benighting spiritual truth (see *ẓulmāniyya*)
bid'a (*see* innovation, something heterodox introduced into the religion)
blessing (see *baraka*)
boat, vision of being in a ____, 174
breaking norms (*kharq al-ᶜawā'id*), **10**, 12, 50 66, 81, 89, 104, 123, **131**, 132, 133, 139 142, 153, 179, **248**
breezes, spiritual (*al-nafaḥāt*), 145, 157, 162, 263
bride as a symbol of Divine Love, **33**
Bridge, or Span of the Afterlife (*al-Ṣiraṭ*), 238
Bughīyat al-Sālik fī ashraf al-masālik (by al-Sāḥilī), 75
Burayja, al- (now al-Jadīda, Morocco), 81, 235, 246
Burda, al- (by al-Buṣīrī) quoted, 1, 30, 57, 79, 80, 96, 131, 146, 233, 252
butcher, incident involving ____, **202**, 210, 233

C

camel, introduction; inspiration that comes like a ____, introduction
cave, the ego likened to a ____ 229; living in a ____, 123
certainty (*al-yaqīn*), 97, 106, 107, 133, 161
charity, 96, 159, 216
chatting (while others pray), **230**
Chefchaouen (Morocco), 246
children, teaching ____, **174**, 181
Christianﷺ, do not strike a ____ or a Jew, 6, 8; land of the ____ 145; the ____ invited to become a Muslim, 233
clarity (*al-ṣafā*), **13**, 52, 122
clouds of mercy, 60
clubs, the man with many ____, 14
companionship (*ṣuḥba*), **103**
confirmed *sunna* practices (*see* sunna)
confusion, 21, 26, 47, 268
contraction and expansion (*al-qabd wa'l-basṭ*), 50, 136, 183
creation and creatures, 5, **6**, 39, 43, **48**, 93, **104**, **108**, 113, 123, 128, 133, 134, **137**, 170

D, Ḍ

Dalā'il al-khayrāt (by al-Jazūlī), 90, 138
dance, sacred , (*al-ḥaḍra*), 92
Day of Judgment, Resurrection, 37, 96, 138, 154, 159, 215, 245, 260, 262

death of the ego, **6**, **8**, 10, 27, **140**, 250
defending oneself (advice against___), **7**, 49, 59, 128, 204, 210
devil, the (*al-shayṭān*), 15, 16, 17, 42, 50, 64, 95, 102, **143**, 160, 187, 229, 233, 243, 262
dhawq (pl. *adhwāq)*: literally "a taste" some form of direct experience of the divine
dhikr (invocation and remembrance either silently or aloud singly or in a group often involving one of the Divine Names or a sacred formula), **3**, **4**, **13**, **15**, **37**, 68, 74, 93, 107, **135**, 138, **144**, **160**, 248, 267, 268, 270, 272
dialogue, spiritual (*al-mudhākarāt*), 92, 114, 132
dreamﷺ, introduction, 50, 81, **99**, 219, 248, 256

E

earth, ___ of the soul, 81; the soul is like ___ , **141**; ___ of obscurity, 147
ecstasy (*wajd*, literally "finding"), 41, 50, 246, 259; woman seized by ___, **187**
effacement (see *al-fanā'*)
effort, the way of ___ (*mujāhada*), 81, 139, 149, 152, 243,
ego (*al-nafs*), 4, **6**, **8**, 10, 12, 15, 22, 26, 29, **44**, **77**, **80**, **93**, 108, 109, 112, 127, 128, 134, **140**, 141, **142**, 145, 155, 156, 179, **229**, **233**, 243, 267, 270
  egoistic thoughts, 22, 59, 133
  slaying of the ___ **6**, **8**, 47
Egypt, 228
elect (*al-khāṣṣ*), 1, 98, 106, 141, 142, 148, 158, 173, 177, 213, 234, 235, 267.
elixir, the true ___ , 63, 82, 123, **232**, 242
enemy (*also see* Devil), 15, 39, 117, 143, 146, 229
Essence, the Divine___ 13, 75, 105, 121 158, 163
excellence (*al-iḥsān*) -
excess, avoiding ___
  in talk, introduction, 24, 33, 39, 95, 153, 157, 196
  in begging, 39, 5, 70, 146
  going to ___ (*see takalluf*)
extremes, going to ___ , **10**, 146

F

fanā' (effacement, extinction, disappearance), introduction, 13, 36, 75, 119, 163, 249
  ___ *al-akbar al-* (the greater extinction: death), introduction
faqīh, pl. *fuqahā'* (someone who is knowledgeable of *fiqh*), 3, 76, 148, 210, 252; ___ who laughed at the Shaykh, 228; ___ who made people laugh, 14; ___; ___ who was harsh to the Sufis, 159; ___ who was plagued by desires, 133
faqīr, pl. fuqarā'): (someone trying to live a life of *faqr*; what the Sufis call themselves), 4, 8, 29, 58, 61, 70, 75, **78**, 111, 123, 126, 140, 142, 153, 154, 155, 158, 164, 176, 247

faqr (literally poverty; spiritual emptiness and need for God), 142, 254

fard, al- ("the unique one" similar to the *quṭb*), 259

faults, 8, 33, 50, 74. 82, 112, 146, 159, 194, 250, 257

Fes (Morocco), 50, 69, 76, 92, 110, 115, 124, 125, 139, 142, 148, 158, 167, 169, 173, 177, 181, 198, 199, 208, 213, 216, 224, 225, 226, 228, 236, 246, 248, 269

fiqh (the code based on the Qur'ān *ḥadīth* and precedence which explains how formal worship is to be performed), introduction, 266

First and the Last, the Inward and the Outward, 13, 133,**178**

food, 64, 93, 123, 208, 217, 246; disciples who said "we need ____," 36, 236, 271; excessive ____ 95, 153, 157; unlawful ____; 18, 41.

foolishness, 166

freedom, the "face" of ____ , 67

fruits of spiritual practice, 120, 122, 143, 145, 246

G

Gabriel, the Angel, 13

garden, 6; fire become a ____, 270; watering someone's ____, 242;

gifts, divine, 13, 81, 96

gnosis (*maᶜrifah*), *48,* 75, 105, 133, 146

God

the Beloved, 20, 74, 82, 96, 178, 243, 269

the Face of ___ , 133

the Name of God (*Allāh*), introduction, 13, 24, 37, 68, 74, 75, 81, 96, 105, 121, 124, 146, 149, 152, 168, 178, 185, 214, 246, 252, 261, **270**, 271, 272

the Presence of ____, 5, 8, 13, 20, 44, 50, 65, 92, 102, 142, 159, 165, 168, 186, 252, 253, 270, 271

the vision of ____, 13, 23, 43, **86**, 91, 98, 99, 110, 123, **133**, 158, **163**

good and evil, 105, 127, 148, 159, 215, 243

grace (divine), 13, 20, 74, 81, 96, 100, 109, 124, 133, 140, 147, 155, 156, 193, 214, 243, 246, 252, 269; the ____ of permission (*idhn*), 69

guests, receiving ____ , 244

H, Ḥ

ḥadīth (a saying of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ quoted, introduction, 4, 6, 13, 16, 17, 39, 40, 50, 57, 58, 74, 75, 78, 96, 97, 115, 123, 126, 131, 133, 134, 140, 142, 150, 154, 159, 163, 164, 168, 200, 233, 242, 244, 250, 252, 256, 261, 262, 264, 265, 266, 270, 271

ḥaḍra (*see* dance)

ḥaqīqa pl. *ḥaqā'iq* (*see* Truth, Supreme)

ḥaqīqa (*see* Truth, Essential, spiritual, Supreme)

Hāshimiyya (name for a female child), 24

heart, **8**, **22**, 29, 43, **72**, **79**, 87, 95, 104, 112, **120**, 137, 153, **252**, **253**

Heaven (Paradise), 91, 123, 266; ____ of gnosis, 82; meadows of ____ 40; people of ___ 146

heedlessness, negligence (*al-ghiflah*), introduction, 1, 13, 16, 17, 40, 73, 84, 93, 126, 133, 138, 140, 234, 239, 245, 253, 268

Hell, 168, 243

heresy, introduction, 261

Ḥijāz, 12

Ḥikam, Kitāb al-(by Ibn ᶜAṭā'illāh) quoted, 1, 4, 13, 15, 24, 26, 31, 34, 57, 58, 81, 83, 85, 105, 120, 123, 133, 139, 142, 143, 145, 147, 148, 150, 157, 243, 246, 253, 257, 271

homeland (spiritual), 44, 52, 109

Houris (maidens of Paradise), 5, 266

Hūd, the Prophet ﷺ, 253

I, ᶜI

idhn (*see* permission)

ignorance, introduction, 11, 19, 28, 36, 37, 48, 81, 100, 123, **128,** 131, 133, 139, 142, 148, 155, 229, 235, 247, 250, 252

iḥsān (*see* excellence)

illness, ___of the heart, 15, **62,** 105, 109, 153, 187, 217; physical ___, 246.

imaginings or illusions *(al-wahm)*, 13, 30, 41, **42**, 80, 106, 133, 234, 243

inclination (*qarīḥa*) towards the spiritual, 13

innovation (*bidᶜa*), 93, 129, 131, 162

insights and inspirations (*maᶜāni, wāridāt*), introduction, 2, 13, 50, 52, 53, 56, 60, 65, 70, 92, 96, 132, 153, 180, 232, 267, 270

intention (*al-niyat*), introduction, 17, 63, 82, 84, 123

invocation (*see* dhikr)

ismu Llāhi (*see* Name of God)

Istanbul, 228

istikhāra (the Prayer of seeking God's choice), 51, 144, **234**

J

Jabal (Mount) ___ al-Aᶜlām, 76, 172, 248; ___ Tizirān, 145

Jabāla (an adjective taken from *jibāl* mountains and used to refer to those people who occupy the lower hills and western slopes of the Rīf Mountains), 266

jadhb (*see* attraction)

Jerusalem (*al-Quds*), 50

Jesus the Prophet ﷺ, 253

Jewﷺ, introduction, 6, 8, 52, 121,150

Jihād al-akbar, al- (the greater struggle), 233

jinn (unseen beings created from fire who inhabit a level of reality which coincides with the physical world), 143, 160, 164, 194, 195, 232, 242, 243, 266

K, L

karāmāt (*see* miraculous)

kharq al-ʿawā'id (*see* breaking norms)
Khiḍr ﷺ, *(*the "green one" or eternal master), 71, 119, 150, 205, 252
Kitāb al-Ḥikam (by ibn 'Aṭā'illāh) (*see Ḥikam*)
knowledge, formal religious, (*al-ʿilm*, pl. *ʿulūm*), introduction, 17, 25, 41, 53, 56, 61, 73, 74, 75, 76, **81,** 87, **88, 96,** 97, 100, 124, 131, 139, 142, 148, 150 157, 169, 171, 264, 266
Laṭā'if al-minan (by ibn 'Aṭā'illāh) , 39, 50, 81
laughter, laughing, 14, 93, 115, 159, 172, **195,** 209, 220, 225, 228, 246, 267
Law, the Revealed ___ (*al-sharī'a*), 6, 61, 65, **66,** 81, 87, 110, 126, **131,** 139, 158, **165,** 187, 253, 256, 265
life, giving ___ to the heart, 4, 8, 13, 82, 91, 112, 158, 244, 250; giving ___ to the Way, 158
light ﷺ ___ and darkness, 18, 94 96 106 109 123 131; ___ in the heart, 246; ___ of certitude, 133, 142; ___ of the Prophet ﷺ, **44**; light upon ___ 38; raying out of ___, 157; spirit made from ___ 52 122
litany, litanies (*wird, awrād*) , introduction, 5, 13, 15, 24, 82, 115,**124**, 127, **152**, **157**, 235, 253, 261
love, ___of God, 8, 15, 30; ___ of the Prophet ﷺ, 12, 33; ___ of the world___, **8**, 11, 32; one's brother, 36;

M

maʿānī (literally, "meanings"; *see* insights)
majdhūb (see "attraction")
Makhfiyya (district of Fes), introduction, 81, 155, 269
makhzān (literally "a storehouse" used in Morocco to signify the authority of the palace), 126
malice, returning good for ___, 12
Manṣūra (Morocco), 145
Marrakesh (Morocco), 213, 215
marriage, 46
means, religious or worldly (*al-asbāb*), 5, 16, 39, 78, 112, 127, 132, 133, 138, 141, 154, 157, 162, 242, 252, 256
meat, eating ___ , 65, 155, 202, 210; incident involving ___, 233
meditation, 15, 50, 95, 178
Meknes (Morocco), 96, 172, 215
miraculous, 246; ___gifts, 173, 221, 257; seeking the ___, 82
Miṣbāḥiyya School, introduction, 148
Moses, the Prophet ﷺ, 81, 119, 150, 159, 163, 253, 265
mosque, 21, 23, 51, 74, 126, 163, 173, 180, **189**, 195, **211**, 244, 246, 256; Qarawiyyin ___ , 6, 50, **138**, 213
*Mubāḥith al-aṣliyya, al- (*by ibn al-Bannā'), quotes from ___, 26, 39, 50, 233
mudhākarāt (*see* teaching)

Muḥammad, the Prophet and Messenger ﷺ, 3, 13, 17, **18**, 20, 21, **44**, 50, 58, 60, 69, 79, 81, 87, 96, 104, 123, 144, 145, 148, 149, 150, 158, 159, 160, 168, 175, 221, 232, 236, 237, 238, 242, 244, 246, 248, 252, 256, 262, 263, 264, 266, 268

  invocation of blessings upon ___ **18**, 20, **38**, 104, **129**, 238

mūlay (Moroccan pronunciation of *mawlāya* "my lord or protector" a title of respect added on to the name of *shurafā*), throughout the letters.

mulberries, incident concerning the baskets of ___, 3

Muqaddam, pl. *muqaddamīn* (representative), 147, 173

muraqqaᶜa (*see* patches)

Murshid al-Muᶜīn, al- (by Ibn ᶜAshir), 266

N

nafs (see the ego)

naivety, 108

Name of God (*ismu Llāhi*), introduction, 13, 124, 149, 152, 178, 214, 270, 272

  visualization of the letters of the ___, 13, 178, 270

need,

  pressing (iḍṭirār) ___, 24, 145, **184**, **185**

  states of ___, 24, 127, 146

Noah, the Prophet ﷺ, 253

noble character (*see* virtue)

noble scribes (the recording angels), 96

nūrāniyya, al-ḥaqīqa al- (illuminating spiritual truth), 66, 146, 247

O

opinion (*ẓann*) of God and creation, having a good or bad___ 67, 96, 155, 158, 164, 232, 242, 252, 256, 270

opposition to the Sufis, 19, 39, 74, 81, 134, 148, 159, 162, 265

Ouezzane (Morocco), 158, 235, 246

Ouhrān (Algeria), 76

outward and inward (*al-ẓāhir wa'l-bāṭin*), 57, 61, 75, 96, 111, 123

ox, oxen, incidents involving ___, **190**, **236**

P

paper, incidents involving ___, **227**, 235; collecting old ___, 79, 139

passions, 2, 9, 13

patched (garments word by Sufis), **5**, 123, 162, **176**, 225, 261

patience, 37, 232

permission *(idhn)*, **13**, **69**, 160

Pharaoh, 26 52 159

Pilgrimage (*al-Ḥajj*), 12, 74, 152, 246, 261

plow, the incident of the ___, **184**

Pole (*al-quṭb*) (the greatest saint alive in a given era), 96, **224**

practice, deeds, actions (*al-ᶜamal*, pl. *aᶜmāl*), **11**, **41**, **57**, **72**, **158**, **252**, 270
  ___ in public or in private, 40
praise and blame, 5, 82, 113, 137, 156
Prayer (*al-ṣalāt*), 93, 245, 250, 260, 262, 266, 267; ___ for rain (see rain)
presence (*al-ḥaḍra*), not finding ___, 24; ___ and absence, 139, 158, 248; the ___ of God, introduction, 5, 8, 13, 15, 20, 41, 44, 50, 62, 65, 77, 82, 92, 107, 142, 159, 165, 168, 253, 256, 270, 272; the ___ of the Prophet ﷺ, 50, 69, 175;
pretenders, 81, **117**, **199**, **253**, 254
pride (*see* ego)

Q

qabḍ (*see* contraction)
qalb (*see* heart)
Qarawiyyin (see mosque)
Qibla (the direction of Prayer), 81, 96, 245, 262
Qinā' (Egypt), 50
Qur'ān, exegesis of the ___ 87; recitation of the ___, introduction, 21, 51, 69, 96, 124, 138, 154, 174, 189, 195, 210, 222, 240, 244, 246, 262, 268; reflection and the ___, **20**; reciting certain sūras (chapters) of the ___ , introduction, 144, 234, 246, 266; varieties of recitations of the ___, 266; Warsh recitation of the ___, 20, 218, 235, 266

R

rain, 60, 208, 211, 242, 246; Prayer for ___, 96, **212**, **215**
Ramīla (neighborhood in Fes), introduction, 228
rayḥān (sweet-smelling plants), 244
Reckoning the (*see* Day of Judgment)
reflection (*al-tafakkur*), 13, 95, 115, 154, 247, 248; ___ of one's own image in another, 74
remembrance of God (*see dhikr*)
repentance, 74, 81
Risāla, al- (by al-Qayrawānī), 266
robe (*see* patched)

S, Ṣ

saintﷺ (*walīy Allāh*, *awliyā' Llāh*, lit., "friendﷺ of God"), 4, 5, 36, 50, 87, 110, 121, 123, 155, **170**, 211, 227, 233, 252; knowing a ___, 13, 81, **139**, 172, 252; taking a departed ___ as a shaykh, 17; faults of a ___, 74; trials of a ___, 69, 105, 134, 143; ___ and Prophets ﷺ, 253; ___ under the power of people, 39; visiting ___, 76, 132, **145**, **172**, 186, 216, 217, **246**
ṣalāt (*see* Prayer)
sanctity (*al-walāya*), 57, 139
secret or mystery (see *sirr*)
sensory world or domain (*al-ḥiss*) 2, 50, 53, 56, 153, 269

separation (*al-farq*, the consciousness of separated from God), 6, 61, 76, 81, 98, 121, 133, 139, 248

servanthood (*al-ʿubudiyya*), **4**, 31, 36, 52, 67, **89**, 145, 147, **151**

Shādhiliyya (Sufi order), 35, 96

sharī ʿa (see Law)

sharīf pl. *shurafā* (a noble, used in Morocco to designate a descendant of the Prophet ﷺ), 12, **79**, **208**

shaykh (literally "an elder" ; spiritual teacher leader of a Sufi order), 130; being your own ___ **255**; choosing a___, **21**, 75; following the advice of the ___, **17**, **125**; need for a ___, **13**; respect for the ___, **102**, **126**, **261**;

silence, 95, 115, 117, 149, 228, 230

sins, 20, 74

sirr (meaning spiritual secret, mystery), 13, 26, 36, 40, 49, 50, 73, 76, 93, 97, 100, 106, 138, 145, 147, 172, 232, 236, 243, 245

snuff, men who used ___, 187

sobriety (methodically travelling the Way as opposed to intoxication), 61, 69, 102, 110, 115, 123, 133, 139, 246, 248, 253, 256, 265, 267

sons, incident of the *sharīf* and his ___, 12

soul (*al-rūḥ*), **12**, 44, 50; ___ like the earth, **141**

station (spiritual), introduction, 17, 57, 69, 87, 125, 127, 134; ___ of effacement, 74, 75, 103, 139, 163, 165; ___ of excellence (*al-iḥsān*), 75___; ___ of Junayd, 139; ___of the Prophet ﷺ, 159 172; ___ of the *quṭb*, 174

stomach, being unconcerned about ___ (i.e. food), 15 65; lawful food in the ___, 18 21 41

stork, incident with the __ , **225**

subsistence (*al-baqā'*), 165

Sufism , definition of ___ **2**, 140, 167, **242**, 262 ; books of ___, 96

sunna (the Prophetic model), **1**, **2**, 28, 36, 38, 39, 50, 58, 93, 100, 104, 129, **158**, 162, 232, 234, 248, 268, 270

sunnī (someone following the *sunna*), 3, 33, 52, 104

sūq (marketplace), ___ al-Ḥarārīn, 203; ___ al-Khamīs, 210; ___al-Raṣīf, 204, 225

Swimming, proceeding in the Way compared to ___ , introduction; "relax and learn to swim," 25.

T, Ṭ

tablet *(lawḥ,* pl, *alwāḥ)*, 174, **177**, 246, 252

Tafilalet

Tāghiya (Morocco), 76, 172

tajrīd (literally, "stripping away", used to mean withdrawing from the workaday world and donning a patched garment), **9**, 39, 57, 65, 84, 123, 200, 206

takalluf (taking on what is beyond one's capacity; overdoing something, going to excess), 24, 152, 154, 270

Tangier (Morocco), 183

ṭarīqat pl. *ṭuruq* (literally "a path or way"; a Sufi order or spiritual method), 69, 81, 98, 123, 126, 143, 145, 152, 154, 156; visiting the masters of the ____, **76**; lineage of the ____ 81; practices of the ____, 157; women in the ____, 187

tawḥīd al-khāṣṣ, al- ("the monotheism of the elect"), introduction 13, 16, 17, 20, 37, 40, 75, 81, 94, 101, 115, 138, 140, 143, 145, **152,** 233, 243, 246, 247, **252,** 256

Tāza (Morocco), 125, 183, 246

Teaching ﷺ, spiritual (*al-mudhakara*), introduction, 13, 14, 22 38 56 91 93 96 142 144 150 169 207 228 234 253 254 261 187

Tetouan (Morocco), 81

threshold, crossing a ____, 238

Tlemsan (Algeria)

Tlemsān, 76, 172

training, spiritual (*al-tarbiyya*), 13, 97, 143, 160, 246, 247, 254, 261

trials, 105, 134, 265

Tripoli, 246

Truth, Supreme or Essential (*al-Ḥaqīqah*), 139, 157, 179, 253, 256, 266

Tūnis, 81

turbidity (*kadr*) and clarity (*ṣafā'*), 52, 13, 17, 31, 109, 122, 153, 180, 239; ____of the ego, 44

tyrant, 8, 23

U, V, W, Y

urination, cleansing after ___, 1, 51, 93, 123, 144, 154, 165, 242, 245, 249, 250

virtue, nobility of character (*makārim al-akhlaq*), 8, 12, 33, 39, 50, 79, 81, 99, 100, 116, 122, 123

vision (*shuhūd*), 6, 132, 133

  inner ____ (*baṣīra*),

  vision (*ru'ya*) of saints, prophets, 33, 50, 81, 149, 175, 246, 248, 256

visiting the saints and people of God, 76, 81, 145, 172, 246

Wādi (river), ____Wargha, 71; ____ Sibū, 71

water (used symbolically), 103, 155, 232

wheat, the incident of threshing ____, 2, 269

whisperings, **93**; woman afflicted by ____ **243**

wine spiritual ___ , 82, 92

wird, awrād (*see* litany, litanies)

withdrawal from the world (see *tajrīd*)

woman, women, 24, 142, 149, 152, 181, **187**, 188, **191**, 216, **218**, **243**

work, worldly, 38, 57, 78, 139, 141; that causes tribulation, **23**; ____ done by women, 152

workaday world (*al-asbāb*), 9, 10, 13, 39, 56, 57, **65**, 70, 78, 84, 112, 123, 169, 141, 166, 158, 200, 261

world (*al-dunya*), **8**, **11**, **16**, **17**, **32**, 53, 62, **64**, 96, 100, 101, 120, 123, 135, 146, 246, **269**
  worlds (levels of reality), 50, 248
writing down (*qiyyad*) spiritual insights, introduction, 24, 87, **227**, 253, 256, **265**
Yawāqīt wa'l-jawāhir fī bayyān ᶜaqā'id al-akābir, al- (by Shaᶜrānī), 265

Z, Ẓ
zakat (obligatory tithe), 152
Zāwiya (literally "a corner"; a place where a Sufi order meets), 40, 115, 179, **181**, 189, 199, 228, 244, 246; building of a ___, 182
Zerhūn (Morocco), 66
ẓulmāniyya, al-ḥaqīqat al- (benighting spiritual truth), 10, 51, 66, 94, 131, 146, 193, 247

Letters on the Spiritual Path

Letters on the Spiritual Path is the culmination of many years' effort to present for the first time a complete rendering into English, or any other western language of all 272 letters of spiritual guidance written by the renowned Sufi teacher of eighteenth century Morocco, Mūlay al-ᶜArabī al-Darqāwī (d. 1239/1823). These letters are a living example of an educative process that provided the wayfarer on the Sufic path with an integral vision of the principles, attitudes, and conduct that constitute Islamic spirituality itself and of the self-effacing comportment that leads to the experiential knowledge of the Divine (*maᶜrifa*). They offer rare insight into the teacher/student relationship within the circles of Islamic mysticism. The letters are singularly personal and touch upon nearly every conceivable aspect of the Sufic path, depicting the Shaykh as a human being living among other human beings, and portraying how, for a person of God such as Mūlay al-ᶜArabī, everything that happens can be seen as infused with the Divine Presence. In this regard these letters are his response to those, like himself, who sought to negotiate the currents of the times without compromising themselves and their values, and are as relevant today as they were to those who so ardently sought copies of them during the lifetime of Mūlay al-ᶜArabī himself. The translation is in clear accessible English, and holds true to the intention of the translators to, "keep in mind the fact that they were written in an intimate register of Arabic that could be grasped by most of the Shaykh's disciples." The text includes an in-depth introduction, is well annotated with hadith and textual referents cited, and has both detailed biographical and topical indexes. This long awaited translation is a must for the library of every serious student of Sufism and provides excellent examples of Sufi literature for the university classroom.

KENNETH ABDEL HADI HONERKAMP
The University of Georgia, Athens

AL-MADINA
INSTITUTE

$39.00
ISBN 978-1-7322588-0-8
53900>
9 781732 258808